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WINDSOR

A POEM

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Interesting Engraved plates

WINDSOR:

A POEM.

WINDSOR:

A POEM,

HISTORICAL AND IMAGINATIVE.

BY THOMAS CHAMBERLAIN.

Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these?—
SOLOMON.

LONDON:
AYLOTT AND JONES, 8, PATERNOSTER ROW:
W. WILLMORE, WINDSOR.

MDCCCXLVI.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY JAMES NICHOLS,
HOXTON-SQUARE.

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TO

THOMAS N. TALFOURD, ESQ.,

SERGEANT-AT-LAW, ETC.

IN ADMIRATION OF HIS GENIUS,

AND IN GRATITUDE FOR HIS FRIENDLY ADVICE.

This Poem

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY HIS OBLIGED AND FAITHFUL SERVANT,

THOMAS CHAMBERLAIN.

859918

TO

THE INHABITANTS OF WINDSOR.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I venture to address a few words to you in a more free and neighbourly spirit than the reserve of a Preface admits of; and, I doubt not, you will listen to me with your wonted kindness.

The praises of Windsor have inspired the verse of Pope and Denham; yet neither they nor any others have celebrated its glories to the extent they deserve. It is not enough to sing of the beautiful scenery by which we are surrounded, or to celebrate the grandeur of the Castle which overlooks our town. The generations that have passed away from Windsor in the silence of forgetfulness; the men of "mighty name" who have trodden its halls, its streets, and its parks; and the historical recollections which cling around its "cloud-capp'd towers;" all demand attention, as well from the poet as from the moralist.

I have made a little attempt to supply this defect in our Windsor poetry; and, in the episodes here introduced, I have endeavoured to depict the spirit of the various ages from the first century of the Christian era downwards.

Without laying claim to perfection, I hope that I have not altogether failed in this; but that the reader of history will find his memory refreshed, as he accompanies me from barbarism to colonial civilisation, from the rudeness of Saxon freedom to feudalism, and thence to the time when, chiefly by means of a purer religion, civil and religious liberty became more fully understood, and was at length forcibly demanded.

I might say more; but I refrain, and offer the work as it is to your notice, feeling confident that you will regard it with the attention which its title demands.

To those of you who have given-in your names as Subscribers, my special thanks are due, and are now gratefully tendered. To W. Jennings, Esq., whom you all so justly esteem, I must acknowledge myself indebted for all the antiquarian lore which the poem contains: such as he are the men whom poets delight to honour.

I am, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Your obedient and faithful servant,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

This Poem is not given to the world at "the earnest request of friends;" for I have but one of a literary character. But as its rhymes are just the outburst of thoughts and feelings which were pleasant to my own mind, I have indulged the hope that they may be acceptable to others in this guise. Many observant individuals may have felt the same emotions while gazing upon the scenery of this locality, and the ideas contained in these verses may be welcomed by them as familiar companions.

It is hardly possible to convey in words a correct idea of the peculiar impulse which moves men to attempt writing poetry. It is neither an appetite nor a passion; yet its influences are sometimes more potent than either of these. It may be a kind of instinct, which lays hold on the grand, the beautiful, and the lovely, whether real or ideal, and is only fully satisfied when its expressions are poured out in song for the enjoyment of others;—somewhat akin, perhaps, to that feeling which the birds enjoy in their song-time.

However this may be, some such power has partly originated the following lines, and now sends them forth upon the surrounding country.

I have but a few words to say concerning the Poem itself. It will be seen that I have made an alteration in the rhyming of the Spenserian stanza. I have no precedent for this; and must candidly acknowledge that my chief reason was, a fear lest I should be unable to sustain its many rhymes without injuring the sense. If I have committed a literary sin in this, I can only crave forgiveness, and promise—nothing.

Throughout the poem I have endeavoured to write plainly,—to use words which are well known; because I do not like to see poetry walk on stilts, nor to hear her speak a language different from mother-tongue.

It has been thought, that long and high-sounding words keep up the dignity of poetry, and express the passions with greater power and force. But that is not now the prevailing notion, nor, indeed, was it ever a correct one. The dignity of an idea does not depend, like wrinkled age, upon outward ornament: its beauty is innate, and the majesty of its charms is rather hidden than brightened by a drapery of cumbrous and enfolding words. Poetry is a living beauty, and not an Egyptian mummy; something to be loved, not buried in a pyramid.

As for the passions, only look at nature, and listen for yourself, candid critic. Love whispers a variety of gentle, fond, and well-known expressions; Anger uses a few strong, yet short, Saxon words; Joy and Grief exult or sigh in mere

exclamations; weeping Pity utters her sympathy in monosyllables; and Revenge, with set teeth and glaring eyes, can scarcely speak at all.

I must confess that in several places this Poem does not please me; yet I have forgiven myself, on the score of fatigue, press of business, or anxiety of mind. Gentle reader, be equally considerate; and when you come to a dull passage, read on till you are enlivened and pleased again. You will find a few poetical pearls strung on this thread of Windsor's history; and if you think them too far apart, be kind enough to remember, that the scarcity of jewels enhances their value; and then I hope you will dismiss with a smile,

Your obedient servant,
THE AUTHOR.

WINDSOR, *April 23d*, 1845.

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WINDSOR:

A POEM.

THE FIRST CANTO.

ARGUMENT.

Origin of the poem—Roman emigrants and British natives—The two races unite—Reflections—A storm presages coming events—The Saxons—Windsor threatened—Single combat—A funeral dirge—Windsor, after another century—The Danes—Alfred—Edward—The monks.

TIME.

THE POEM BEGINS ABOUT A.D. 67, AND THIS CANTO ENDS BEFORE THE NORMAN CONQUEST.

I.

Oft from the Castle's northern terrace high
Mine eyes have gazed upon the plain below,
Where Windsor and scholastic Eton lie,
And Father Thames glides through with easy flow.
Then Thought with noiseless, yet with rapid, wings
Would bear me backward to the former ages;
And Fancy with her bright imaginings
Would raise the men embalm'd in History's pages,
Monarchs and poets, warriors, priests, and learned sages.

II.

And as I roam'd through ages dark and old,
And saw perform'd again the deeds of fame,
Or trod the flowery mead, or dungeon cold,
Or palace proud, with men of noble name,
I struck the lyre that oft in childhood's hour
Had soothed my troubled mind with native song:
Then sounded from the touch a strain of power
That, flowing as the tide of ocean strong,
Resistless bore me in its rapid course along.

III.

Hail, Muse divine! undying Spirit, hail!
Who in dread majesty didst reign of old,
When boundless forests sounded to the gale
In mighty concert with the waves that roll'd
Around our isle; and aye delighting more
In these wild notes of nature, than in strain
Of Druid bard, the' historian of yore,
Whose harp exulted o'er the warrior slain,
Or hail'd the ruthless victor from the gory plain.

IV.

Muse, ever young! thy mantle o'er me throw,
And, as I backward look, anoint mine eyes
To see as thou hast seen. Thou hearest: Lo!
How wide the change! All Windsor fades and flies;
Green wilds before me lie; the Castle's hill
Bears an old chieftain's hut; his council meets
Beneath a spreading oak; and near it still
A group of strangers come: the foremost greets
The painted savages, and thus his tale repeats:—

V.

"From Italy we come :—Nay, start not, chief;
We come not, in the haughty name of Rome,
To claim thy homage; but to seek relief
From tyranny that riots in our home.
She whose steel'd armies have enslaved the world
Is now a slave: her sons, though freemen born,
Sleeping in timid sloth, supine, are hurl'd
By arm'd ambition down: they lie forlorn,
Objects of tearful women's pity, warriors' scorn.

VI.

"Nor this the worst. Our lands are swallow'd up
By greedy nobles, and the' enfranchised slaves
Of proud commanders; yet we lived in hope,
Till threat'ning Famine pointed to our graves.
Profane themselves, our rulers have decreed
Deaths terrible to all who worship God
Save as *they* list: the gentle Christians bleed
In every country that our feet have trod,
And barely we escaped the seekers of our blood.

VII.

"To Lud we came; thence by the river led,
We seek for some lone spot for tillage meet.
If ye agree, here shall our tent be spread,
And recompence be poured at your feet;
If not, we westward go. The isle as yet
Brooks ill the iron yoke of Roman might;
Yet are your brethren kind, if kindly met,—
As gently mild in hospitable rite,
As roughly fierce and desperate in bloody fight."

VIII.

"Hence, race of vipers, hence!" a Druid cries:
"Heed not, O chief, the Roman's oily tongue:
Our fathers erst believed their smiling lies,
And, writhing, died, as by a serpent stung.
Bold Caradoc in fetters felt their pride:
Slain Boadicea's ghost yet shrieking flies
Upon the tempest; all her warriors ride
In stormy fury through the darken'd skies,
And shout in every blast, 'Rise, vengeful Britons, rise!'

IX.

"Our angry gods look from their lofty hall
For wonted sacrifice of vanquish'd foes:
The rolling thunders speak their wrath on all
Who, by oppression gall'd, in sloth repose.
Pour forth, O chief, to' appease their dreadful ire,
The blood of these intruders; and then sound
The trumpet-blast of freedom: like swift fire
The news shall spread; and, as it echoes round,
Fall'n Britain shall arise from dust, erect, unbound."

X.

A savage murmur hereat bursts from most;
Nor long nor loud, but fitful and suppress'd;
Like growl from tiger, as he rolls in dust
The foe whose poison'd arrows pierce his breast.
"Rash men," thus speaks the chief, "forbear your wrath!
Our father's speech is cruel and unwise:
A deed like this such vengeance would call forth,
That we in vain should supplicate the skies;
Our gods are aye unarm'd when Roman legions rise.

XI.

"For you, ye strangers, since ye come as foes
To tyrant power, here shall ye safely dwell,
Unless Rome's minions break on your repose
With martial shout, far worse than savage yell.
I and my tribe delight more in the chase
Than tame-lived husbandry: far in the wood
Will we repair, and leave this open space
For you and yours. In vain we have withstood
Your nation's arms; we take your friendly neighbourhood."

XII.

The Britons part, and in the forest-shade
Are lost to sight: the Romans all in peace,
As days revolve, plough up the fruitful glade,
And reap with swelling hearts the great increase.
Sweet sabbaths dawn, as weeks of labour end;
And all in solemn Christian worship join;
Save those who through the mazy forest wend
To teach the friendly Britons lore divine,
That Jesus Christ has sprung from David's royal line.

XIII.

Dark is the Briton's soul, and horrible
His wild ideas of the Great Supreme:
His hero-gods are deified, as full
Of every passion that debases him.
Yet when the gospel shines, the ebon gate
Of ignorance flies open, and the rays
Of heavenly truth display his fearful state;
Till, led through true repentance up to praise,
In Christian confidence he ends his chequer'd days.

XIV.

Swift flies the gospel-sound, and from afar
The natives haste to hear the wondrous tale :—
Risen in Britain is the eastern star,
And bloody superstition turneth pale.
In vain the ancient Druids strive to stem
The torrent of inquiry : mind awakes,
And, maugre every priestly stratagem,
From bonds of hoary-headed Custom breaks,
And for her human guide the hand of Reason takes.

XV.

Love hovers o'er the Roman settlers now ;
And many a youth doth wander through the wood
To seek his native maid, and many a vow
Of fond endearment charms her solitude.
The different races mingle into one,
By lasting bonds of young Affection join'd,
The greatest civilizer 'neath the sun.
Love softens down the roughest of mankind,
Nor joineth hand to hand, till mind unites to mind.

XVI.

The years roll on : the generations fall
Like autumn-fruit, shook by the hand of Death
From Time's old tree ; nor fairly ripen'd all ;
Too many in sour greenness end their breath.
Yon blooming youth, scarce trembling on the bough,
Dreams of long years all crown'd by smiling love.
The morning sun of life shines on him now ;
But, ere the noon, he falleth from above,
And fond affection mourns him, like a widow'd dove.

XVII.

Another, full of high ambition, swells
His mind with study, hoping to obtain
Some high renown: no difficulty quells
His ardent soul, so he may knowledge gain.
He nourishes a canker in his breast;
His restless mind wears out his feeble frame.
Scarce is he with his hard-earn'd honours blest,
Scarce sounds the pleasing blast from trump of Fame,
When pale Consumption's hand doth quench his vital flame.

XVIII.

Another seeks the all-seducing gold,
To buy him power or pleasure, or to hoard
In useless heaps; in avarice grown old,
He rots alive, shakes, falls, by all abhorr'd.
The spendthrift, fill'd with wine and brutish lust,
Pampers his appetites by guile or force;
His understanding grovels in the dust;
Nor fit for aught save harlots' vile discourse,
The fool sinks down from bad to everlasting worse.

XIX.

In swift obscurity, four hundred years
Are well-nigh gone; and with them pass away
Some shouts of laughter, and some floods of tears;
Joys of a moment, sorrows of a day.
Fain would I weep: Is this the lot of man,
And this alone? A pigmy thought can bound
More than he has, and measure with a span
His length of life. But, lo! the heavens surround,
And immortality absorbs in thoughts profound.

XX.

Peaceful are Windsor's hills and fruitful dales;
The winding river gently flows along,
As listening to the plaintive nightingales
That warble on its banks their sweetest song
The shades of evening darken into night,
The hamlet slumbers in serene repose,
The waning moon displays her silvery light,
The spangled heavens their sparkling gems disclose,
Till all the firmament with silent rapture glows.

XXI.

Slowly rolls on the car of solemn night;
Till, lo! at length the cheerful dawn appears;
Its faintest streak surpassing all the light
That glanceth from the moon and starry spheres.
Above the' horizon climbs the glorious sun;
But from the west a tempest-cloud draws nigh,
Low-muttering thunders tell the storm begun,
All red and angry burns the eastern sky,
And long-imprison'd winds in furious vengeance fly.

XXII.

Like night returning, spreads the heavy cloud,
And hides the light of morn from mortal eye;
The thunders nearer rolling roar aloud,
And vivid lightnings fright the trembling sky.
Down rush the torrents through the burden'd air;
Loud howl the winds with more than mortal noise,
As though tormented fiends, toss'd wildly there,
Give vent to endless rage and pain in cries
Of shrieking horror and half-utter'd blasphemies.

XXIII.

Forth from the pitchy blackness darts a flash
Of blending light; as though the gates of hell,
Burst by mad furies, with a sudden crash,
Let out with blasting flames the fearful knell
That deafening thunders peal for evermore,
The foaming waters, chafing at control,
Across the frighted valleys headlong pour.
As, rushing down from mountain, hill, and knoll,
They take the shortest course to their great ocean-goal.

XXIV.

But storms and tempests, when with fearful strength
They terribly show forth the' Almighty's power,
Are things of earthly birth and earthly length,
And all must end in smiles their darkest hour.
The lightnings cease, the thunders die away;
The rain is o'er, the angry floods repose;
The clouds dispart, and heaven's clear blue display:
The howling whirlwind now no longer blows,
But gentle zephyrs pass, to woo the blushing rose.

XXV.

The morning sun gives forth a brighter ray.
And every opening flower smiles through its tears;
And every drop that glides from leafy spray
A gem, a diamond, of light appears.
The warblers of the grove their songs commence;
The flocks and herds in wonted pastures feed,
Men own the guardian care of Providence,
And learn to trust, in hour of deepest need,
In Him from whom all storms and calms alike proceed.

XXVI.

What changes come o'er Windsor? The past storm
Suffices for an index to the tales
Of sage historians, whose old scrolls inform
Of war and blood, fierce shouts and plaintive wails.
Loud Rumour, from the north with swiftness flying,
Tells of invasion by the Pict and Scot;
And how the country, all defenceless lying,
Becomes an easy prey, while many a cot
And many a town in smoking ruin mourns its lot.

XXVII.

Well-mounted posts across the country ride
With summonses for council, war, or flight:
The great ones meet, and divers schemes divide
Their anxious minds, half vanquish'd with affright.
Bold Valour in an old centurion speaks,
And loudly asks for arms and troops enroll'd.
Pale Cowardice, though wealthy, only seeks—
Since all things of the earth are bought and sold—
To buy ignoble peace with enervating gold.

XXVIII.

A middle course is chosen in the name
Of prudence, and the whole assembly join
In asking Saxon aid; for common Fame
Tells how *they* sell their blood for Roman coin;
And that within their martial bosoms dwell
The nobler qualities of humankind,
Though smother'd by idolatries, which quell
Their purer feelings;—good and ill combined,
A chaos of ideas, their untutor'd mind.

XXIX.

The Saxons come ; the Caledonians flee
Back to their barren hills with vanquish'd haste :
The Britons shout the welcome victory,
In hope the peaceful fruit thereof to taste.
Vain hope ! delusive joy ! The Saxon hordes
Behold with envious eyes the fruitful land
Yield plenty to its weak degenerate lords,
Men who wield weapons with unpractised hand,
Nor brave in single fight, nor skill'd in high command

XXX.

" Give place, ye coward loons," the Saxons say,
And quickly gain possession of the isle :
The Britons save themselves as best they may,
In rocky fastness or in strait defile.
Barbaric darkness o'er the country spreads,
Thick mists of hell roll o'er the moral sky ;
Religion, Science, Letters, bow their heads
In sudden death, or faintly westward fly :
Blind Heathenism alone sits frowning, throned on high.

XXXI.

How fareth Windsor ? Lo ! its fate is near :
The son of Hengist leads his warriors on.
Saxons are brave, the natives quake with fear ;
The fight must soon be o'er, the village won.
A trumpet sounds, and thus the herald speaks :—
" Give ear, O Britons ! Get ye gone from hence !
The Saxon Hengist, son of Hengist, seeks
A home for him and his. Make no defence,
But with your lives retire, nor tempt stern violence."

XXXII.

The children cry, the women loud lament,
The men are sad to leave their native place:
The youthful Saxon doth somewhat relent,
And granteth them a transient hour of grace,
And offereth to meet in single fight
One they may choose, who, if he win the day,
Shall gain thereby for all his clan the right
To pass with all their wealth unscathed away,
Or, yielding up their land, permission here to stay.

XXXIII.

Who dares to meet the flower of Saxon youth?
What hope that Briton will with him contend?
Who can rely upon barbarians' truth?
Who own the fierce and faithless Saxon,—friend?
Yet who to general fight would have recourse,
And feebly battle with determined foes?
What power has right against an armed force?
And who, when falling 'neath resistless blows,
Can bear to think of wife and child, and all their woes?

XXXIV.

Yet whither can they fly, bereft of all?
Their naked lives would soon be valueless;
Some would from sickness, some from famine, fall,
And all be whelm'd in fugitive distress.
"Up, Britons! to the fight!" Alas! the fire
Of courage is but transient, soon it fades:
No armed warrior burns with fearless ire,
Nor love itself the coward youth persuades
To show them worthy of those weeping dark-eyed maids.

XXXV.

Young Hengist walks in arms before the town,
In moody silence, the allotted hour ;
And, as the moments pass, a gathering frown
Upon his brow doth like a tempest lour.
Weak indecision o'er the Britons reigns ;
The time is well-nigh past, and nothing done.
What ! have ye not within your sluggish veins
The blood of those by whom the world was won ?
Is there no valour left ? Dull silence answers, "None."

XXXVI.

At length appears, unheralded, alone,
Before the Saxon chief, a youth in arms ;
And thus he speaks :—"Hengist, the hour is flown ;
Thy dreaded name our villagers alarms ;
None comes to battle, all prepare for flight
With tears and dirges : I alone am found
In arms to dare thee to the mortal fight.
By right inspired, I seek this hostile ground,
A stripling weak, against a hero high renown'd."

XXXVII.

The Briton's form is one of matchless grace,
His voice like gentle music dies away,
Surpassing beautiful his blushing face,
And beam his dark eyes with bewitching ray.
Hengist awhile in admiration stands ;
Then mildly speaks :—"My heart could wish, fair boy,
Thou wert my brother ; and though now thy hands
Be arm'd against me, I would not destroy
So fair a flower of earth, to gain great Woden's joy.

XXXVIII.

"I would thou hadst not dared me to the strife ;
And yet thy valour gives thee half thy charms.
What wretches, to expose thy tender life,
To shield their grovelling cowardice from harms !
Abjure thy race, and let them hence depart ;
Take thou the Saxon name, and dwell with me.
Thy gentleness shall wind around my heart ;
And I, in angry war or peace, will be
Teacher, defender, guide, and counsellor to thee."

XXXIX.

The Briton blushes like the sky at eve,
And short replies :—"Hengist, I came, unsent,
To claim thy former offer : let us leave
This idle talk ; here is my argument."
So said, he whirls around his flashing sword,
With rounded shield defends his throbbing breast,
Attacks with confidence the Saxon lord,
Nor aims at bosom broad, or neck, or crest,
But skilfully assays his sword at once to wrest.

XL.

Ah youth ! thou shouldst have used thy gentle tongue,
And urged thy purpose with persuasive speech ;
The weapons of thy mind such terms had wrung
As all thy skilful valour ne'er may reach.
The fair-hair'd Saxon calmly meets his skill,
And only seeks to tire him, not to smite ;
Bears back the fiercest of his blows at will,
And smiles, with all a soldier's high delight,
To see his stripling foe so valiant in the fight.

XLI.

The Saxon's arm is wounded: luckless blow!
The smart calls forth a flash of angry heat:
One sweeping stroke, and, wounded, staggering, lo!
The Briton falleth at the Saxon's feet.
"Alas, my people! Hengist, spare our race,"
He gaspingly implores with tearful glance.
The stream of life pours from his wound apace,
Sad paleness spreadeth o'er his countenance;
His soul within him bounds, and hails deliverance.

XLII.

Adown the Saxon's face big tear-drops fall;
He gently lifts from earth his fallen foe,
Swears by his gods and sword to grant him all,
And kindly strives to staunch his life-blood's flow.
"Hengist, thy heart is tender: my poor sire
Lives in yon cot; there, 'pray thee, let him dwell.
Loose not my corslet, let me thus expire:
A maiden I: inter me in yon dell.
Farewell, O Saxon! learn of Christ, of heaven: farewell!"

XLIII.

"Ye gods, what have I done? Ah! cruel cheat!
The soldier's helmet hid thy raven locks.
Accursed rage! now is my woe complete;
Death claims this peerless maid, and me he mocks."
Thus wails the Saxon, struck by sudden Love,
And deeper wounded by the fiend Despair;
Call'd in an hour the bitterness to prove
Of fond affection melted into air,
With all its train of joys, phantoms as false as fair.

XLIV.

The Saxons crowd around ; some Britons come
With trembling curiosity to know
What unknown champion's death hath seal'd their doom,
While striving to drive back the tide of woe.
" It is," they say, " the soldier Alick's child ! "
And soon the fatal news doth reach his ears.
" I've slain her, then," he cries in accents wild ;
" I call'd ye cowards, blamed my stiffening years :
Unknown to me, she arms, and sudden disappears."

XLV.

The poor old man goes forth to meet the dead
With trembling steps and heart too sad for tears,
Bows to his breast his venerable head,
And mutters words which none distinctly hears.
O life ! how irksome is thy latter path !
But few can reach it, and those few forlorn.
No budding hopes, no blooming joys it hath ;
Life's roses, faded all, leave but their thorn ;
The stumbling travellers walk weary, faint, and torn.

XLVI.

Alas, old man ! if thou dost own no more
Than earth hath given thee, thy all is gone,
Vanish'd the last fair treasure of thy store,
And thou in bankrupt grief art left alone.
Who now shall cheer thee in declining age,
And make thy heart forget its former woes ?
Who strew the path of thy long pilgrimage
With filial love, which, wide-diffusing, throws
O'er earth its fragrance, sweeter than the opening rose ?

XLVII.

The grave is dug within the flowery dell,
The lifeless clay is slowly carried there ;
Old Age with groans of sorrow sounds her knell,
And youthful Beauty weeps the hapless fair.
Old Alick weeps, his tears find issue now :
The soften'd Saxons march unarm'd along :
Their heads in grief the youth of Britain bow,
The while their maidens, separate from the throng,
Thus chant with gentle lay the sad funereal song.

THE DIRGE.

Sleep on, dear maid ; thy sun is set,
The shades of evening o'er thee close.
We 'll lay thee where the violet,
And every fragrant flower that blows,
Shall throw its perfume o'er thy long repose,
With fond regret.

Pacing slow, with solemn tread,
Bear her to her lowly bed.
Hark ! nature hums her lullaby
With rivulets' low-murmuring sound,
With gentle zephyrs' melting sigh,
And echoes faint around :

" The budding flower is nipp'd by frost,
The blossom canker-bitten,
The fragile bark by tempest tost,
The maiden fair by death is smitten,
And all her beauty lost."

Nay, say not so; it won in death
A lover fond, and young, and brave:
She died, but with her latest breath
Claim'd all her people from the grave.

Kind Heaven rest thee, peerless maiden!
Though swift thy course, and short thy stay,
Thou never more, with sorrow laden,
Shalt heave a sigh, or weep, or pray:
Happy spirit! denizen of endless day!

Mourn her not with hopeless sorrow;
Death is not eternal sleep:
Life's day is past, but Heaven's morrow,
Dawning, bids us cease to weep.
Lay in earth her lifeless clay,
Let her dust return to dust;
The shouts and clangour of the judgment-day
Shall wake her with the just.

XLVIII.

Revolving years
Have doled another century out in days;
Young Spring with smiles in fair green vest appears,
And all the feather'd songsters chant her praise.
The merry children sport on Windsor green,
Saxon their language, and complexion fair;
But in the glancing of their dark eyes' sheen,
And raven hue of their luxurious hair,
I see the mingled blood of ancient Rome is there.

XLIX.

'T is sweet to hear their merry prattling tongues,
'T is pleasant to behold their beauteous forms:
So glad their sports, the aged gazer longs
Backward to fly from care-worn manhood's storms,
And join, as once he did, in childish game,
And loudly laugh, and gambol with delight;
Or chase the lapwing, when she feigneth lame;
Or ramble by the river's banks, till night
Demands a swift return for fear of wandering sprite.

L.

The ploughboy whistles, and the ploughman hums,
Some simple ditty or old roundelay;
With grunting charge the sturdy swineherd comes;
The sheep and kine along the meadows stray.
The honest franklin with observant eye
Walks all around, and gives directions meet.
At home the busy wheel the maidens ply,
And charm their toil with vocal music sweet,
Or list to matrons' tales, with warnings all replete.

LI.

At eve the labourers from the field return;
And some their suppers take, and then repose;
While others with young love's impatience burn
To reach the trysting-tree ere day-light's close;
And oft the silent night-owl, flying near,
Or prowling fox, forth stealing from his place,
A faint, half-whisper'd colloquy may hear,
As, with a noiseless, slow, reluctant pace,
And fondly twined arms, their footsteps they retrace.

LII.

Hence, monkish legends! the polluted lore
Of learned falsehood dims the passing scene.
But gently flowing, with its "winding shore,"*
True to its ancient course, the Thames is seen;
And happily, beneath the Saxon sway,
In peace and quiet Windsor still remains:
Nor history's page, nor poet's warmer lay,
Doth celebrate its joys, or mourn its pains,
As greater than the common lot poor earth obtains.

LIII.

The roving Danes sail o'er my vision now,
Their pirate-banners flaunting in the breeze:
The rolling tides, all dyed with blood, tell how
They sweep the Anglo-Saxons from the seas.
Landing, they spread o'er England's frighted isle
The terror of their name by sword and fire:
But Alfred, great in arms, with swift recoil
Guides back the desperate rush of England's ire;
The Danes or die, or yield, or fearfully retire.

LIV.

Mercy for fallen foes is seen to weep;
Justice, exalted, gives impartial doom;
Learning revives from long-indulged sleep;
Fair Science issues from barbaric tomb;
And Piety, fair child of fairer Heaven,
Flies o'er the land to charm all earthly woes:
The word of God in mother-tongue is given;
And though in Romish priests rank error grows,
The common people in the gospel faith repose.

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* See Note A, at the end of this Canto.

LV.

But Alfred dies, the light of England fades!
Succeeding monarchs reign in blood and wars;
Yet oft in Windsor's calm and peaceful shades
They seek relief from their distracting cares.
Fierce Denmark triumphs, but his reign is brief·
Edward the Saxon sceptre sways again,
Good man and kind; but, lost in blind belief,
To save his pious soul from future pain,
He to designing monks gives Windsor's wide domain.*

LVI.

Ye monks of Mammon! is it thus ye sell
The pardon of the' Almighty? Teach ye this
For gospel-truth,—to fright with flames of hell,
Groans of lost souls, and demons' horrid hiss;
Then shut the door of mercy on the soul,
Nor suffer man to fly for pardon there,
Till in his wealth your greedy avarice roll,
And ye, with great parade and pious air,
Perform deluding mass, and heartless, long-drawn prayer?

LVII.

Work, mystery of iniquity, work on!
Extol the mighty power of Peter's keys;
Let ignorance her darkest mantle don,
And image-worship bend unholy knees.
Enthrone the Virgin; call her "heavenly queen,"
And "God's own mother!"—light the dreadful flame
Of purgatory; draw a darkening screen
Of ceremonies o'er the Saviour's name,
And loud your lofty rule o'er common sense proclaim.

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* See Note B, at the end of this Canto.

LVIII.

Ye will succeed; too well I ween, ye will:
For, brutish and unlearned as ye are,
Ye hold the keys of knowledge; and your skill
Will fashion pompous lock and costly bar.
Ye will succeed, because ye have pent up
The gospel-stream, and in its channel turn'd
A filthy flow of error,—poisonous slop!
Which fond credulity, by fever burn'd,
Delirious drinks,—what human nature else had spurn'd.*

LIX.

Ye will succeed: your staunch ally, red War,
Shakes o'er the nations his destroying spear;
Intestine discord scattereth near and far
The seeds of hatred, vengeance, blood, and fear.
Ye will succeed: fierce Tyranny puts on
His iron armour o'er his marble breast;
Fair Liberty flies, trembling, pale, and wan,
Like hunted fugitive, from east to west;
And Hydra Feudalism exalts his armed crest.

LX.

O that I could condemn, in deathless line,
And numbers terrible as ocean's roar,
The impious Church, who calls her creed divine,
Dyes her fierce dogmas in opposers' gore,
Builds up, on fire and faggot, rack and chain,
A dungeon for the world's inquiring soul,
And for herself a *throne!* Doth Heaven contain
No blasting thunder? Mercy, let it roll!
Thou holdest in thy hand long-threaten'd righteous dole.

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* See Note C, at the end of this Canto.

NOTES.

NOTE A.—Page 32.

Rejecting the ridiculous legends attributed to this period, I may just say, that Camden supposes, the remarkably *winding course, or shore*, of the river here first to have given a name to the town; it being called by the Saxons Windleshora, *Windleshora*. The Saxon Monarchs had a palace at Old Windsor, and often resided there; but its site is now unknown, the parchments that speak of it having proved more durable than its foundations.

NOTE B.—Page 33.

King Edward the Confessor gave this manor to the monastery of St. Peter, at Westminster. The instrument of donation, which is still extant, says, that the King, "for the hope of eternal reward, the remission of all his sins, the sins of his father, mother, and all his ancestors, to the praise of Almighty God, granted, as an endowment and perpetual inheritance, to the use of the Monks there that serve God, Wyndlesora, (situate within, yet at the east point of the county of Berks,) with all its appurtenances." —(*Monast. Anglic.* tom. i.) William the Conqueror afterwards persuaded Eadwin, the then Abbot, and the Monks, to accept some lands in Essex in exchange for Windsor; and it has remained in possession of the Crown ever since.—POTE'S "Windsor," 1749.

NOTE C.—Page 34.

I once heard Mr. Moffat, Missionary to the Bechuanas, say that "the natives cannot be brought to believe that men in India and elsewhere are so stupid as to worship gods that they can hold in their hands, and break to pieces." What would these savages think of the Popish doctrine of transubstantiation? Eating a God is even a degree lower in absurdity than any thing that modern Heathenism, fertile as it is in follies, has offered to the credence of its unenlightened votaries.

THE SECOND CANTO.

ARGUMENT.

The battle of Hastings—Windsor Castle is founded—The Crusades—The Saxons treated with more humanity—King Richard I. overhears his esquire and a lady plight their troth—The marriage—Windsor Castle taken—Reflections—King John and Runnymede—Magna Charta—The order of the Garter—Worldly honours fade, and acknowledge death for their lord—Wickliffe—Windsor at this period—Fashions change, but hearts change not—The wars of the Roses—A maiden's sorrow and death.

TIME.

FROM THE CONQUEST TO THE REIGN OF HENRY VII.

I.

Lo! on the plain of Hastings armies meet:
What pomp and show to feast the gaping grave!
Red Glory weaves a nation's winding-sheet,
And bloody battle swallows up the brave.
The levell'd lances of the mail-clad knights
Bear down the choicest of king Harold's train:
Bravely the last of Saxon monarchs fights,
His people's choice, but chosen all in vain;
Death ends in shadowy fame his short and troublous reign.

II.

Duke William triumphs; England is his prey;
And he, the conquering lion, rends and tears
His stricken victim, as he gives away
To Norman knights the lands of Saxon heirs.
The ruthless minions of the ruthless king
Make havoc of the Saxons; horrors rise
On either hand; insults and miseries wring
The aged heart, while youthful beauty flies
The spoiler's lust in vain with tears and shrieking cries.

III.

And shall this conqueror be crown'd with bay,
And hail'd victorious on bended knee?
For him shall Poet chant the' immortal lay,
To shield from future scorn and obloquy?
Nay, let him perish! His right hand hath slain
A nation's freedom: let his memory rot,
Or brand of infamy for ever stain
His hated name; let those he hath begot
Disturb his tyrant reign with war or secret plot!

IV.

High-priest of feudalism, his hand may rear
Huge fortresses, as altars to his god;
Dark, strong, and terrible they may appear,
As e'er have frown'd since mighty Babel stood.
The hand of Him who keeps the world in awe
Shall strike his heart with terrors, shall cut short
His reign and race: God laughs at tyrants' law;
And time, his slowest servant, maketh sport
Of pleasure's gilded halls and power's strongest fort.

V.

On Windsor's hill a Castle riseth high,
The monarch's palace and the subject's jail:
Above are pleasures, mirth, and revelry;
Below, the Saxon prisoners, hopeless, wail:
Save where some iron-hearted captive, bound,
Yet unsubdued, like eagle in a cage,
Doth hear the heavy curfew's hollow sound,
And, muttering curses on the tyrant age,
Assays to break his chain, and grinds his teeth for rage.

VI.

The villagers, slow pacing to their toil,
Glance at the Castle with an evil eye;
Their labour and their meal-times aye beguile
With rumours of revolt, or armies nigh:
Or, met around the social hearth at night,
The neighbours tell of insult, scorn, and wrong;
And, weeping those who fell in bloody fight,
Or pine in durance, they their stay prolong,
Till curfew-hour of darkness separates the throng.

VII.

Then home they go; and, lifting up their eyes,
They smile in sadness at the blazing stars;
No curfew ringeth in the' illumined skies,
No tyrant Norman heaven's enjoyment mars.
'Tis well the love of life is deeply writ
In human nature; else the panting soul
Would burst its clayey tenement, and flit,
From earthly tumult and proud man's control,
Swiftly through death's dark shade to its eternal goal.

VIII.

Within the fortress William holds his court:
Right valiant knights, esquires, and noble dames,
With all gay pleasure's minions, there resort,
To feed the lamp of pride with courtly flames:
The curfew's sound but calls for merrier dance
And deeper wassail-bowl: the festive crew
Indulge in jest and mirth and meaning glance.
But, lo! time shifts the scene; how changed the view!—
The revellers in shrouds rot 'neath the sombre yew.

IX.

Hark! what a cry! United nations shout
The wild decree that calls the Crusades forth;
War robes his horrors in a garb devout,
And with enthusiast armies frights the earth.
The Genius of chivalry displays
His martial virtues and his social pride,
Attracts the Christian world's admiring gaze,
Gains beauty's self for his enchanting bride,
And over court and camp sole monarch doth preside.

X.

O martial Glory! how thou hast allured
To sudden death the youthful and the brave!
What griefs, what pains, what perils are endured,
What mighty efforts made, to grasp—the grave!
A spectre thou, a skeleton, array'd
In garments woven from the breath of Fame;
A moral vampire, with thy wings outspread
O'er multitudes, who end their feverish dream,
Their brief and lost existence, in—perchance a name.

XI.

No wandering Troubadour am I, to sing
In stirring song the deeds of daring knight ;
No honour'd Minstrel, with enchanting string
To fire the soul, or melt with soft delight.
I may not join the bold Crusaders' band,
Though Tasso lures with sweetest harmony ;
Nor stray from Windsor to the Holy Land,
Though England's knights have cross'd the stormy sea,
And with Duke Robert earn high names in chivalry.

XII.

For now from Windsor's Castle issue, free,
The Saxon captives, greeted by a crowd
Of smiling, shouting, tearful kin. To me
Nor princes, belted knights, nor barons proud,
With all their trains of followers, can yield,
In lengthy march, or battle's grand array,
Or thundering charge across the bloody field,
So great a sight, so glorious a display,
As this first act of justice, freedom's dawning day!

XIII.

Succeeding monarchs learn,—'t is well they do,—
Their safest title is their people's love ;
And Henry doth impartially pursue
His royal course, old bitterness to move.
But Beckett's pride and priestly arrogance
In life and death disturb his latter reign :
Unlawful love brings with it dire mischance ;
Woodstock conceals the peerless fair in vain,
Arm'd jealousy pursues,—fair Rosamond is slain.

XIV.

King Richard rides through Windsor Forest, pondering
How best he may his government bestow
While he, o'er hostile land or ocean wandering,
Leads his brave lances 'gainst the Paynim foe.
Slowly he rides, and thoughts of gloom and sorrow
Remind him of his father's woe and care:
"I will," he cries, "religion's aidance borrow,
To shield the state from wily kindred's snare;
And London's Tower and Windsor's fort joint rule shall bear."

XV.

The King rides onward, till a gentle strain
Of music floateth through the charmed air,
And bindeth him in its romantic chain
Awhile, unseen, unheard, to listen there.
Deep in a copse beneath a noble tree,
Two lovers meet, their lasting troth to plight,
In heartfelt song and skilful minstrelsy,
Such as in memory may wake delight,
And cheer in saddest hour with hopes all fair and bright.

MINSTREL.

King Richard he soundeth the trumpet of war;
His knights are all arming for famed Palestine:
Once more I have met thee, dear maiden, once more,
To vow that till death I will ever be thine.

The star of my fortune, arising still higher,
Shall shine with a ray of more glorious light:
Thou wilt never again see thy Herbert the 'squire;
Yet my bride thou shalt be, love, the bride of a knight.

The ocean is broad, and the way it is long,
The sepulchre guarded by vigilant foes:
Old Time will be older, ere victory's song
Shall finish our warfare, and promise repose.

But then with the laurels of war I will twine
A fair bridal wreath for thy beautiful brow:
Again I will whisper, "Dear Maude, I am thine,"
As the priest at the altar recordeth our vow.

LADY.

Two turtle-doves in loving mood
The live-long day were sweetly cooing:
No foe disturb'd their solitude,
No parent stern forbade their wooing.

The hawk upon an aged oak
Far, far away his nest was making:
The dove his timid mate forsook,
And left her gentle bosom aching.

Straight to the hawk he wing'd his way,
And dared him forth to mortal fight;
While all around the oak there lay
The bones of doves, all blanching white.

The hawk was strong, the dove was weak;
The' unequal conflict soon was o'er:
The hawk arose, and, ah! his beak
And talons strong were stain'd in gore.

The widow'd dove in sorrow mourn'd
His long, long absence day by day;
And when his dreadful fate she learn'd,
She sigh'd her loving life away.

MINSTREL.

Dear Maude, why, thy story is sad, and thine eyes
Are weeping the fate of thine ideal doves;
Yet thy gentle bosom full soon would despise
A lover whose merit is but that he loves.

If branded a coward I here should abide,
While Richard is fronting the foe o'er the wave,
O how could I lead thee, a beautiful bride,
In dance 'midst the lovely, the honour'd, the brave?

LADY.

Haste, get thee gone, dear Herbert, go;
Thou ne'er shalt own a coward's name:
'T is sad to dwell apart in woe,
But worse to wed and live in shame.

Yet when in joust or mortal fight
Thy lance doth win the victor's prize,
Be, as thou vow'st, my own true knight,
Nor e'er thy constant Maude despise.

I will not doubt thy constancy;
But, when the eastern beauties smile,
Let this my bracelet speak to thee
Of early love in England's isle.

XVI.

The king retires, and soon his fleet doth sail
In daring hope across the mighty main:
Dull mists and distance from the gazers veil
The whiten'd cliffs they ne'er may view again.
'T is sad—though Hope may whisper pleasing things,
And high Ambition point the spirit's aim—
To leave our land, our home, and all that clings
With life-long fondness and endearing name;
Loved father-land presenteth then its dearest claim.

XVII.

De Pudsey rules in Windsor; factions rise,
And hurl the warlike bishop from his throne:
Change follows change, and Rumour laden flies
With victor's shout, and vanquish'd sufferer's groan.
From Acre's siege, from long and harass'd march
And desperate battle, England's valour shows:—
The whole crusade, one grand triumphal arch
Of knightly fame; and on the keystone glows
King Richard's name, engraven there by friends and foes.

XVIII.

The nuptial torch is lit
And brightly shines in Windsor's highest tower;
Right dainty cheer, and smiles, and jesters' wit,
And wine, and laughter, rule the joyous hour.
Sweet music speaks; now nimble dancers glide
With witching motions and voluptuous grace:
Chief in the throng Sir Voleur leads his bride,
And fondly glances at her lovely face,
Where smiles of wedded love the maiden blushes chase.

XIX.

The governor is he of Windsor's tower,
A favourite partisan of treacherous John;
And she is own'd by all as fair a flower
As e'er the sun of beauty smiled upon.
Yet what is beauty but a painted screen
That often hides deceit and female fraud?
Lo! 'neath the beauty of this bride is seen
The faithless heart of the enchanting Maude,
Who vow'd such tender love ere Herbert went abroad.

XX.

Thus absence severs young affection's ties,
Ere wedlock's chain has bound the roving will;
Yet many a tale is gilt with pleasing lies
Of love in absence, pure, unwavering still.
Love writes, at first, as on a sandy shore,
A lover's name within the female breast;
The rising waves of absence, rolling o'er,
Erase the characters at first impress'd:
Scarce can an age supply one heart that stands the test.

XXI.

Fair morning draws aside the veil of night,
And Phœbus darts aslant his earliest ray;
The loftiest towers, crown'd with golden light,
Smile back their welcome to the coming day.
The sentinel, slow pacing to and fro,
Notes the retiring of the brightest star;
Then glancing carelessly his eyes below,
Sees armed horsemen riding from afar,
And warning gives of coming foes and threatening war,

XXII.

"For action, ho!" the clanging trumpet calls;
The drowsy wassailers put on their arms;
Sir Voleur hies him to the outward walls,
And Maude's fair bosom throbs with strange alarms.
Hark, soldiers, hark! that shout, "The king, the king!"
'T is Richard's self the garrison behold.
"Up with portcullis! down with draw-bridge! fling
The gates wide open!" Sudden, fierce, and bold,
They seize their leaders, and the flag of loyalty unfold.

XXIII.

With sound of trumpet, and with beat of drum,
With loud huzzas, and weapons waved on high,
The soldiers hail their long-lost monarch home,
And many a veteran weeps for very joy.
Sir Herbert enters with his royal lord,
A belted knight, a warrior approved:
He knows how ill his Maude has kept her word;
And scarce his pride allows how well he loved,
Since she, by honied words, from plighted faith is moved.

XXIV.

Sir Voleur rideth forth a banish'd man,
With burning rage and shame upon his brow:
His following bride, all tearful, wild, and wan,
So late his joy, embitters anguish now.
In spite of all her beauty, forth she goes
Unwept, unpitied, because false as fair;
One hurried glance around augments her woes;
For, with contending passions in his air,
Sir Herbert, once so fondly loved, stands gazing there.

Spirit of song, awhile farewell!
My heart is faint, my voice is low.
Thy strain is like a magic spell
That waketh phantoms robed in woe;
And mourning memory appears to tell
How sudden misery rang young Hope's funereal knell.

XXV.

O life, what art thou but a battle-field,
Where all the passions wage perpetual war?
First young Desire displays his burnish'd shield
And eager sword, from Hope's unbroken car:
Then sick Disgust, and Hate, and wounded Pride
In stern misanthropy enthrall the mind;
And young Credulity is forced aside
By aged Scepticism, who seeks to blind
The half-shut eyes of men with falsehoods well refined.

XXVI.

In vain the learned of the earth attempt
By subtle argument to calm the strife;
No sage hath plann'd, no poet ever dreamt,
A remedy for all these ills of life.
Yet He whose mercy is as heaven high
Unfurls the banner of the Prince of Peace;
Then Rage and Passion from our bosoms fly,
And gentle Love bids every contest cease;
Yea, Misery's self doth smile in prospect of release.

XXVII.

King Richard falls; his only mourners are
The iron-hearted men he led in fight:

His life was glory, and he dies in war,
The foe of peace, the warrior's delight.
John sways the sceptre, and in Windsor's tower
Immures the victims of his royal spite :
A crowned tiger he, whose cruel power
In wildest tyranny doth tear and smite ;
His face with smiles enwreath'd, his heart with hellish night. *

XXVIII.

Yet tyrant's power is not beyond control,
Nor crowned dignity above command.
The hugest waves of ocean roaring roll,
And threat to swallow up the frighted strand ;
Yet back are driven in their utmost rage,
Nor ever pass their sandy boundary :
So despotism is curb'd in every age ;
For, when with rising power it threats the free,
United thousands stem the flood of tyranny.

XXIX.

Dear Runnymede ! † in everlasting green
Be thou array'd ! no ploughman tear thy sod ;
Nor time himself deface thy verdant mien
Till earth dissolves before the face of God
Here stand I,—not a Poet now, to sing
In flowing numbers, merely : words are tame :
The mind is lost in grand imagining,
And patriot ardour kindles into flame ;
For Freedom arm'd appears to' assert her deathless claim.

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* See Note A, at the end of this Canto.

† See Note B, at the end of this Canto.

XXX.

In vain has Freedom by her martyrs spoken,
While singly they arose, and singly fell:
The Norman fetters still remain unbroken,
And rings the curfew yet the Saxon's knell.
The laws and customs of their sires infringed,
Their property and persons insecure,
'T is much that Englishmen so long have cringed;
But now endurance will no more endure,
And patriot barons guide the vengeance of the poor.

XXXI.

Right noble vengeance, such as heaven might shower!
They spare the trembling tyrant, but pursue
To deep destruction all tyrannic power
O'er goods, or life, or law, or revenue.
Now Freedom's voice *is* heard, the royal ear
Must list to truth; the king to justice bow:
For on the plain of Runnymede appear
Such cogent arguments, that, monarch, thou
Art fain to sign thy despotism's death-warrant now.

XXXII.

Hail, noble barons, knights, and troopers brave!
Soldiers of Freedom, hail! your cause is won;
O'er England now shall Magna Charta wave
Like a triumphal flag: you glorious sun,
Now sinking in the west, shall haste to rise
Upon a nation free; your sons unborn
The purchase of your swords shall dearly prize.
Leave them the weapons ye so well have worn;
Then he that toucheth liberty shall feel its thorn.

XXXIII.

Time rolls his circling years, and great events
Are dated by his foot-prints : good and ill
Seem thrown at random ; blinded man laments
His want of power to read the' Almighty's will.
The young oft wither, and the blooming die,
The generous and the good return to dust ;
While solitary age for death doth sigh,
And cringing meanness, into honours thrust,
Gives countenance to vice, and frowns upon the just.

XXXIV.

Time rolls along ; I may not tarry here
To moralize, and lose myself in thought ;
Yet when pale Melancholy wanders near,
I linger with her, and the world is nought.
Back to these days the antiquary gropes,
And rakes from rubbish long-forgotten things,
Mementoes of proud monarchs, bishops, popes,
Knights' orders, bulls, swords, mitres, chains, coins, rings,—
Lumber much prized, but heavy for my Muse's wings.

XXXV.

Edward, the warlike, doth at Windsor light
So fair a star for honour's cloudless sky,
That warriors, guided by its radiance bright,
Shall live in glory, or in glory die.*
From age to age the Order shall descend,
The highest honour England can bestow
On those who bear her sword, her throne defend
From inbred enemy and foreign foe ;
The pillars of her state, her own in weal or woe.

* See Note C, at the end of this Canto.

XXXVI.

Yet, hark! a hollow echo fills mine ear:
'T is Death's dull voice; he calls the honour'd dead.
Each garter'd knight ariseth from his bier,
And kneeling to the spectre bows his head.
Shame on ye, shadows! or shame on the earth,
That gives her honours unto men of war,
And to the courtly things of titled birth!
Mere mortals all her garter'd worthies are;
Aloft they soar, blaze, vanish, like a shooting star.

XXXVII.

Yet these were famous in their little day,
And flatterers promised them enduring name;
But with their breath remembrance died away,
And near posterity forgot their fame.
They shone in life; but where is now a ray
To cheer the darkness of their gloomy graves?
No radiance hovers round their knightly clay;
The lords of earth are now enshackled slaves,
And Death above their tombs his bony sceptre waves.

XXXVIII.

But in the moral atmosphere I see
A brightening light; like summer-morning's dawn.
It breaketh on the night of Papacy:
And, as dark error's curtains are withdrawn,
The slumbering mind of Albion awakes;
And, lo! her dauntless sons, by WICKLIFFE led,
Assault the papal throne, until it shakes
To its foundations; such a guilty dread
Hath Superstition, when the word of God is read!

XXXIX.

See how old Rome and younger Oxford stir!
Fat Mother-church hath all a step-dame's ire.
Good dame! 't is pity to disquiet her,
And force her threat with dungeon, rack, and fire.
She loves her children, kind old soul! she says;
But Truth, seductive, lures her sons away;
And so, to cure these naughty runaways,
And teach her other children not to stray,
She burns them at the stake, as quickly as she may.

XL.

'Neath the observance of the royal eye,
And led by many well-fed surpliced priests,
The Windsor burghers travel quietly
In ancient error on, like docile beasts.
They hear of Wickliffe; for old John o'Gaunt,
"Time-honour'd Lancaster," befriends the man;
And haply some of them despise the cant
Of Romanism, which ends in curse and ban;
But Conscience lags behind, when Business leads the van.

XLI.

And so they live in ignorance and peace,
Bow to the priests, and loud huzza the king,
Count up the profits of their trade's increase,
And shut out conscience from the reckoning.
They dwell in houses low, of wood and clay:
Some few have windows glazed, and chimneys high;
The rest have lattice-work, to' admit the day,
And open roofs, through which the smoke may fly,
When it has choked each throat, and moisten'd every eye.

XLII.

Dress is absurd : the tradesman's lengthy coat
With ugly hood is mounted ; ladies fair,
So fond of jewelry and ribbon'd knot,
A cumbrous gown above their kirtles wear ;
The court-gallant before his belle parades
His three-pile velvet and embroidery,—
A good advertisement to many trades ;
But most the worthy cobbler's friend is he,
For his enormous shoe-toes proudly join his knee.

XLIII.

Even so the outward, artificial man
In dress and manners changes with the time ;
The heart alone beats as it first began,
Heedless of fashion, ages, race, or clime.
The gush of young affection sparkles forth,
Like a bright fountain ever flowing there ;
And rolls its welcome streams upon the earth
Of human nature, else so scorch'd and bare,
To freshen forth a thousand flowers of beauty rare.

XLIV.

Plant of fair Eden's growing, blooming love !
Thy beauty charms us, and thy fragrance cheers,
While o'er this dreary wilderness we rove,
Lured by false hopes, or chased by gloomy fears.
Being of beings, God of love ! we know
From this, a remnant of our first estate,
How in thy presence loving seraphs glow,
And how our spirits thou canst elevate
To dwell with these in love, pure and inviolate.

XLV.

In wintry barbarism love doth bloom,
And blossoms in the landscape wild and drear,
Shadows the cradle, waves above the tomb,
Perfumes the nuptial hour, and decks the bier.
The summer state of civil life is gay
With forced exotics, seen to be forgot :
But love, for ever fair, blooms in the way
Of all life's travellers, to cheer their lot,
And in its melting sweetness breathe, " Forget me not."

XLVI.

Youth clasps it to his bosom, Man admires,
Age in his memory treasures up its flowers ;
Rough-minded Labour yields to soft desires,
And hurried Business to calmer hours.
Heaven-gazing Science plucks it with delight,
And calm Philosophy with transport warms ;
Music and Poesy in love unite,
Fair Painting copies its bewitching forms ;
And mild Religion smiles upon its heavenly charms.

XLVII.

Yet, where love blooms within the human heart,
The serpent jealousy oft lurks anigh ;
And as we pluck the flower, a sudden smart
Pierces the breast with writhing agony.
Is there no wreck of Paradise left free
From its old enemy ? Alas ! not one ;
In changeless human nature's frailty
We feel how utterly we are undone,
And, struggling in the serpent's coils, make piteous moan.

XLVIII.

Up, musing mortal, sighing moralist,
Poetic dreamer! look from Windsor's Tower.*
The land is in convulsions; clouds and mist
And fearful tempests o'er the country lour.
The rival Roses bloom, or fall, in blood:
Fierce Faction arms himself with deadly hate;
Revenge emerges from the crimson flood;
And York and Lancaster, by turns elate,
Fall in the deadly strife, or rule the troubled state.

XLIX.

The trumpet's clang through peaceful Windsor rings,
And many simple swains forsake their toil.
In vain the maiden to her lover clings:
He leaves her arms, to plunge in war's turmoil.
For York the young, for Lancaster the old;
Opinion, turn'd to fury, draws the sword:
The shepherd rages now a soldier bold;
The ploughman and the thresher in accord
Cut down in thickest fight their once much-dreaded Lord.

L.

Time sees the battle; yet he hasteth past,
And flies from view of thousands in a day;
Scarce stays to hear the sigh, the deep, the last,
With which the dying wretches 'gin to pray.
Kings reign and die: at length on Bosworth plain
The crooked Richard falls to rise no more,—
The last White Rose, but dyed with many a stain
Of ruthless tyranny and kinsman's gore;
And now stern Henry Tudor wears the crown he wore.

* See Note D, at the end of this Canto.

LI.

A Windsor maid
Goes towards a noble oak, her trysting-tree,
Far in the Park ; alone, beneath its shade,
She sitteth down, and weepeth bitterly.
Poor girl! she danced with joy two days ago,
To see her father safe ; but when he said,
"I slew at Bosworth with one downright blow
Young Edward Green," she stopp'd, her colour fled ;
One piercing shriek she gave, and down she sunk as dead.

LII.

They raised her, and recall'd her fleeting breath ;
Yet none could light her mind's ethereal fires :
All her existence is but living death ;
For, quench'd in anguish, Reason's light expires.
But yet how beautiful she is, though now
Her eyes have lost their mirth, her cheeks their bloom!
Lovely in grief, she bends her sadden'd brow,
Like Innocence enduring others' doom,
And seeking but one comforter,—the silent tomb.

LIII.

So have I seen, array'd in living green,
A weeping willow overhang the stream ;
Though down its trunk had blasting lightnings been,
And written "Death" in many a gory seam,
Days, weeks, and months, that sad and stricken tree
Hung o'er the waters its devoted head ;
And oft a low and plaintive melody
Among its drooping leaves the night-breeze play'd,
A wailing requiem before the doom'd was dead.

LIV.

The autumn passes, and the leafy dress
Of nature takes a thousand varying hues:
Stern Winter comes in aged ruggedness,
And to his icy sceptre all subdues.
Alike to yon poor maid the seasons are:
Day after day she rambles in the Park;
Nor homeward turns, until the evening star
Hath lighted in the gloom its cheerful spark;
Then home to broken rest, till morning wakes the lark.

LV.

The sun is set, the hour is growing late,
The stars are twinkling forth; but where is she?
A neighbour saw the poor unfortunate
Last 'neath her oak; and there she yet may be.
The grief-worn father lifts his dying child,
And fondly clasps her to his troubled breast:
She sighs, looks up, and smiles as once she smiled;
A few fond words, a sentence half-express'd:
'T is over now; the weary wanderer is at rest.

LVI.

Thus falls, O War, thy living monument!
'T is thus, grim Death, thy menial servant sweeps
The human wrecks, the remnants thou hast rent,
Into eternity's unfathom'd deeps!
O when will man, immortal man, discern,
His conflicts should be mental? Mind alone
Should arm her powers, and glorious victory earn,
Till, Ignorance and Error all o'erthrown,
Unchanging Truth is placed on a triumphal throne.

NOTES.

Note A.—Page 48.

John sent to Lord Bramber, demanding one of his sons as a page. Lady Bramber heroically answered, that "she would never surrender her children to a king who had murdered his nephew." In revenge, John imprisoned the whole family in the Castle, and starved them to death.—Stoughton's "Windsor in the olden Time," page 11.

Note B.—Page 48.

Runnymede is within sight of Windsor Castle, and ought to be visited by all who come to view that noble building. The spot where the foundations of England's freedom were laid cannot but be dear indeed to the heart of every Englishman.

Note C.—Page 50.

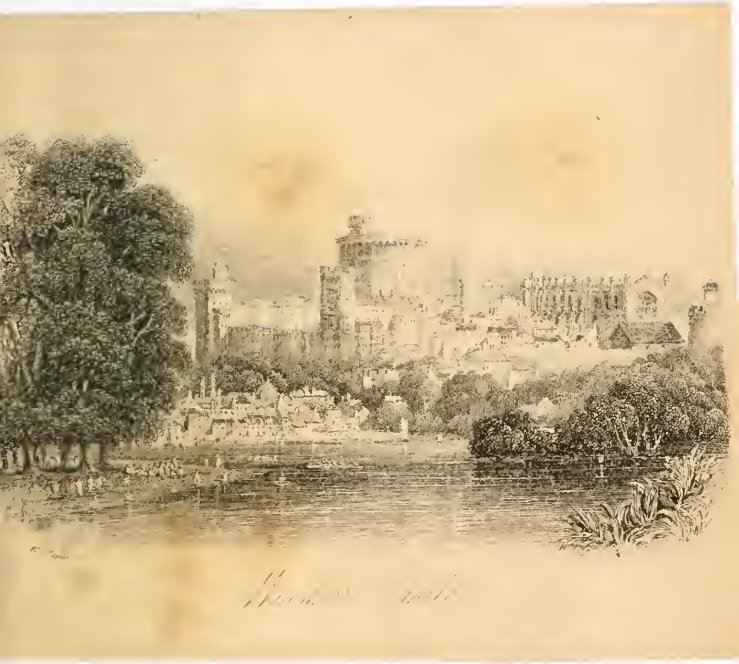
Edward III. having given his own garter for the signal of a battle that proved successful, (supposed to be that of Cressy,) he thence took occasion of instituting the Order of the Garter at Windsor, with great pomp; on which occasion there were tilts, tournaments, and other feats of arms, for several days. The king himself took part in these jousts, having for his device a white swan, gorged or, with this daring motto wrought upon his surcoat and shield:

Hay hay the Whyte Swan;
By God's Soul I am thy Man.

Pote's "Windsor," pages 135, *et seq.*

Note D.—Page 55.

From the top of the Round Tower, eleven or twelve counties can be seen by the naked eye. How many more "the poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling," can see, is uncertain.



THE THIRD CANTO.

ARGUMENT.

Martyrdom of Testwood, Filmer, and Pearson, at Windsor—Reading Abbey confiscated—Death of the Abbot and two Monks—Edward—Mary—Corporation of Windsor—Elizabeth crowned—Comes to Windsor—Her council—The Armada—Burnham Beeches—Shakespere and Raleigh—Their deaths—Prince Charles, and Windsor scenery—Events of the time of King Charles—Mine host, his daughter, and nephew—Mine host imprisoned—Ralph Emmett and Mary.

TIME.

FROM THE REIGN OF HENRY VIII. TO THAT OF CHARLES I.

I.

THE Castle's heavy bell rings stern and slow;
Its hollow echoes fill the trembling air:
Death from a distance hears the note of woe,
And hastens to the feast preparing there.
In bloom of manhood three are doom'd to die,
Victims to kingly power and priestly hate.
Hark! in the dungeon how they pray and sigh!
Anon, Hope tells them of a happier state,
And Faith triumphant bids them scorn their gloomy fate.

II.

The sheriff leads them to the fatal stake;
The fire is lighted, and the flames ascend:
Half hid in smoke, their last short look they take
Of vaunting enemy and weeping friend:
Then up to heaven their scorching eyes are cast;
Mingled with Nature's groans, their prayers arise;
Until their burning lips and tongues at last
Fail to pour forth their hearts' convulsive cries,
Which start, and bound, and break, in awful agonies.

III.

"Alas! what have they done, that thus they die?"
They read the Bible for themselves, and saw
Denounced at once Rome's vile idolatry,
And Henry's bloody "Articles" of law.
Bold Testwood raised his daring hand, and smote
The nose from Mary's image: what a deed!
Pearson and Filmer have both dared to quote
The Scriptures God has given for men to read,
Against the blinding errors of the Romish creed.*

IV.

"Poor innocents!" the wrath of man is spent;
The vengeance of the church has done its worst:
Man can but harm this clayey tenement,
Till the fair spirit doth its bondage burst.
The martyrs' ashes strew the blacken'd ground,
And, eloquent in death, new converts gain:
The light of Reformation spreads around;
And, maugre lustful Henry's brutal reign,
The Spirit's sword divides dark superstition's chain.

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* See Note A, at the end of this Canto.

V.

No sculptured marble tells the bloody tale,
No pillar rises o'er their resting-place:
The guilty "powers that be" perchance would veil
The triple murder and their own disgrace.
Yet after-ages should admire the zeal
Which made these champions so bold for God;
Posterity should set the sculptor's seal
Upon the hidden spot, the mournful sod,
Where bigots' flames devour'd the noble martyrs' blood.

VI.

They were the foremost in the ranks of truth,
The messengers of Windsor's rising mind,
The hope forlorn, to lead her hopeful youth
Against the enemy of human kind.
They were true heroes, men who dared to face
The frowning terrors of the Romish world,
The pioneers of an illustrious race
By whom oppression shall be headlong hurl'd,
And freedom's sheltering flag o'er England wide unfurl'd.

VII.

Go, gentle Muse, and hang a wreath of bay
In fame's great temple for the sainted three:
Let not their sacred memory pass away
To dark and fathomless oblivion's sea.
In storms, let lightnings tell their fiery end,
And distant thunders echo back their groans;
In peace, their names let whispering zephyrs blend
With all the fragrance of our verdant lawns,
And all the light and life with which bright summer dawns.

VIII.

In Windsor's Tower the gallant Surrey pines,
And sighs for lovely Geraldine in vain ;
Fair Boleyn bright in queenly beauty shines,
And haughty Wolsey heads the courtly train.
The monarch's bosom is a troubled sea,
Or lull'd or toss'd by passion's lawless power :
Awhile he crowns with rank and dignity,
And then, in jealous fury's raging hour,
Commands the axe his best and fairest to devour.

IX.

The sage historian dips his pen in tears,
Or chronicles in blood the sad events.
The Romanist the changeful monarch fears,
And justly quails before his bold intents.
The monks are rich : King Henry needeth gold :
That which they gain'd by fraud, force may demand.
Some nunneries and monasteries old
Are dens of lust and vice ; and taint the land
With evils which the better sort in vain withstand.

X.

Up, kingly power ! up, courtiers, to the spoil !
See their rich treasures, and their broad domains !
Lo ! with but little risk and little toil,
One sweeping blow, and then what golden gains !
Away, away, to Reading with a writ :
Its wealthy abbey is a noble prey.
The lordly abbot must with grace submit ;
If not, the rope and axe ! No longer stay ;
Up, gallant hearts ! for Reading, ho, away, away !*

* See Note B, at the end of this Canto.

XI.

Within the abbey all the monks are seen,
Intently listening to their honour'd chief;
Who, with due dignity in voice and mien,
Thus utters his forebodings and his grief:
"Time was, my brethren, when the Church of Rome
Gave law unto the world; earth's proudest lord
Was humbled to the service of a groom,
When God's vicegerent spake in wrath, and warr'd
Against his haughty throne with spiritual sword.

XII.

"Alas for us! the tide is strangely turn'd;
Our pontiffs temporize, our brethren quail;
The crown which erst a papal legate spurn'd
Warreth with holy Rome, and doth prevail.
Disunion and apostasy at work
Sap the foundations of our sacred cause;
While Cromwell's spies in every corner lurk
For horrid scandal, which may shield new laws
To plunder us, and gain the yelling mob's applause.

XIII.

"The lesser Houses are suppress'd, and we
Are hourly threaten'd; 't is an awful time:
But, God being helper, this old abbacy
Shall foil their purpose, or dye deep their crime.
I pray ye, brethren, join yourselves as one
To stem this torrent of apostate rage;
And none shall say, that Hugh of Farringdon
Fail'd, in the eve of dedicated age,
To' oppose the workers of blasphemous sacrilege

XIV.

"Hark! 't is the clattering of a cavalcade;
How loud they shout! Go, Francis, ask their will,
And why with clamorous rudeness they invade
Our quiet at an hour unsuitable."
"Sir abbot, with due reverence for you
And your high rank, permit us to unfold
Our royal warrant; which demands a true
And just account of all ye have and hold
In lands and houses, jewels, goods, and treasured gold."

XV.

"Hear me, my masters! all we have was given
Without reserve, condition, or restraint;
Save this, that prayers should ascend to heaven
Lest aught should still the donors' souls attaint.
This abbey is the Lord's, and we are here
The stewards of his treasure: unto him
With joy we render up account sincere;
But never to a mortal's lawless whim,
Though tortures threaten death, and tear us limb from limb."

XVI.

"Ah! say'st thou so, right reverend father? Then,
In Henry's royal name, I here arrest
Thee and thy monks of treason: this huge den
Hath been, I wot, a goodly feather'd nest
Of poisonous sedition; but, by all
That ye adore, here shall its mischief end.
Sir abbot, wilt thou now thy words recall,
And for his highness' gracious pardon bend?
No? Then, guards, off with him,—the gibbet be his friend!"

XVII.

November's fog hangs over Reading town ;
The tardy daylight feebly struggles through.
To-day a triple deed of death must crown
The seizure of the abbey's revenue.
The death-bell tolls, and forth they slowly come :
The mounted gibbet groans beneath their weight ;
" Hung, drawn, and quarter'd,"—'t is a fearful doom,
A bloody porch to death's sepulchral gate :
But see, how sternly calm these men endure their fate !

XVIII.

O horrible ! to murder men because
In pride and avarice they had grown old ;
Too old to bend or stoop, too bold to pause,
When law o'erleap'd the barriers of their fold !
'T is dreadful when triumphant Vengeance wields
The sword of Justice ; none can 'scape the blow :
No rank secures, no sanctuary shields,
No generous feeling spares, the fallen foe ;
But deadly Hate exults to see his victim's woe.

XIX.

The fatten'd king falls sick, and dies, to find
Himself uncrown'd and as a peasant poor ;
But, let me draw the veil, and hide behind
The judgment this huge tyrant must endure.
On earth, his bloated carcase is interr'd
At Windsor with great pomp and pageantry :
But what care worms how man is sepulchred ?
The human form of high or low degree
Soon sinks a shapeless mass of rank putridity.

XX.

Young Edward reigns, a gentle boy and kind:
In peace the Reformation works its way;
Much has been done, and more is yet design'd;
But death commands, and Edward must obey.
His father's reign was like a stormy day;
And his, a cheerful sunbeam at its close:
But night comes on, with Mary's bloody sway,
Not with calm quiet and serene repose;
For, bigotry the flame of persecution blows;

XXI.

And hundreds, roasted in the angry fire,
Men, women, children, yea, even babes unborn,
In all the agonies of heat expire,
While Mary hears their cries with heartless scorn.
Hence, bloody tigress! senseless bigot, hence!
Virtue abhors thee, Mercy gives thee o'er;
Justice shall deal thee fitting recompence,
Thou shameless daughter of the scarlet whore,
Drunken with horrid draughts of martyrs' hissing gore!

XXII.

But what of Windsor? "Tell it not in Gath:"
When Mary and her husband came in state,
The Mayor and Corporation lined their path
With acclamations! Well, I wot, the weight
Of "Castle custom" bore their conscience down;
And so these worthy men of pence and pounds
Did customary duty to the crown.
O covetousness! how thy harness bounds
Man's nobler nature in thy sordid mill-wheel rounds!

XXIII.

The bells are ringing!
How sweet their music is at first to me!
As though united Joy and Hope were flinging
Their fairest garlands on the melody;
Or, on its distant echoes fondly flying,
To chase poor mortals' griefs and boding fears,
Were each to each, in accents sweet, replying,
As weeping maidens smile away their tears,
Or mourning widows feel the bliss of former years.

XXIV.

Yet soon, too soon, mine ear discerns the bell
That woke my heart to sorrow long ago:
In thrilling sounds it rang my mother's knell,
And fixed in memory deep its note of woe.
I hear it as death's voice among a choir
Of happy spirits; and it jars mine ear.
'T is ever thus; to me earth's joys expire,
Or in the gloom of sorrow disappear,
Even while hope charms, or bright imaginations cheer.

XXV.

The bells are ringing for the coronation
Of queen Elizabeth; and, lo! she comes
To Windsor, dinn'd with loyal acclamations,
The boom of cannons, and the beat of drums.
Devices quaint, extravagant addresses,
And rabble-bonfires, tell the general gladness;
And she with royal dignity expresses
Her gracious hope, that never more may madness
Of Popish fury cause her loving people sadness.

XXVI.

Throned in her people's hearts, the virgin queen
Defies the gloomy bigot of proud Spain;
And in her council sits with brow serene,
Though huge armadas sweep the startled main.
"What say ye, Lords? on whom should we confer
The chief command of this our gallant fleet?
We would not that herein our wisdom err;
Courage may rashly charge, weak fear retreat,
And vaunting foes profane our shores with hostile fleet."

XXVII.

Lord Dudley speaks, "Your Grace will doubtless choose
A noble Protestant for this high post;
Else one, I fear, who hath no faith to lose,
May grieve but little if the realm be lost."
"Now, by my faith, this is foul scandal, Lord,
On all who think as I," Lord Howard cries:
"I am a Catholic, yet my good sword
Doth Priest and Pope and Spain alike despise,
When they against our queen and liberty arise."

XXVIII.

"Methinks 't were well," wise Cecil calmly says,
"To put good faith and trust in noble Howard:
We and our fathers, all are witnesses,
His race yields neither traitor false nor coward."*
"Lord Howard," cries the queen, "I seek to reign
O'er all my people, worship as they may:
Be thou High Admiral, and Heaven deign
Its aidance to thee in this stormy day!
My Lords, I thank you all; now to our posts away!"

* See Note C, at the end of this Canto.

XXIX.

Kings may command, and thundering cannons roar ;
Death on the iron hail fly fierce and fast :
Yet, what is this to Him whose mighty power
Rolls the strong tides, and guides the whirlwind's blast ?
Harmless the dreaded bolts of death rush by,
Except His righteous Will allow the blow :
Therefore to Him ascendeth England's cry
For help against the power of Spanish foe,
Who threats with blood and fire the truth's grand overthrow.

XXX.

Upon the martyrs' graves, the aged sires
Of Reformation bow their knees in prayer :
Not theirs the gentle breath of faint desires ;
The mighty power of praying faith is there.
Like him of old who for vile Sodom pray'd,
And held the hand that shook the fiery rod ;
Like him who through the roaring waters made
The path which trembling Israel safely trod ;
So these poor men draw down the mercy of their God.

XXXI.

'Tis not enthusiasm to ask and have ;
Nor frenzied madness thus to seek and find.
Wild Scepticism his maudlin doubts may rave,
And theorize upon the human mind :
We know, that He, the High and Mighty One,
Inhabiting eternity, looks down
In love upon the suitor at his throne,
The faintest trembler at his gathering frown,
And does his faithful ones with special favour crown.

XXXII.

The Armada flies, and England's fleet pursues,
Captures, or sinks, or drives the beaten Don.
Huzza for Howard, and the gallant crews
By Hawkins, Drake, and Frobisher, led on!
Enough is done by human might and skill,
To teach the world that heretics are brave;
And now the instruments of Heaven's will,
The whirling tempest, and the dashing wave,
Scatter, or swallow up in ocean's wide, wide grave.

XXXIII.

To Windsor oft the virgin queen repairs,
Fatigued with pomp, and worn with regal toil;
Roams in its shades, and breathes its balmy airs,
Observes the varied culture of the soil,
Or rears a terrace of commanding view,
Or beautifies her Castle, or designs
Diversions for her court, her favour'd few,
Or o'er her maiden solitude repines,
Or listens to the charm of Shakespere's magic lines.

XXXIV.

Not far from Windsor, Burnham's beeches grow,
Heroes of ages, veterans of life: *
Old Time in vain hath dealt them many a blow,
And baffled Death in hunger fled the strife.
Themselves their history: the Poet's eye
Reads o'er these chronicles of olden days,
While round him gloomy ghosts and spirits fly,
Eternity's long vista meets his gaze,
Till, lost, he sinks in deep, unutterable amaze.

* See Note D, at the end of this Canto.

XXXV.

Beneath these sons of eld two strangers walk :
A courtier one, a man of varied parts ;
Well skill'd in science, manners, wit, and talk ;
The charm of company, the lord of hearts.
The other, guided by poetic light,
Explores the caverns of the human mind,
And lays the springs of action bare to sight ;
He leaps the boundaries of human kind,
And roams o'er universal nature, unconfined.

XXXVI.

Raleigh and Shakespere ! both in serious mood,
Deep thoughts absorb them as they stroll along
Beneath this olden bower of solitude
Which shades the courtier's wit, the poet's song.
Twin-born with Time, and young though years decay,
O Nature ! here thy works proclaim with power,
"Time *was* to myriads that have pass'd away ;
Time *is* to mortals of the present hour ;
Go, use it well, O men : Time soon shall be no more!"

XXXVII.

These men have look'd on princes, yet esteem'd
Themselves as noble ; they have seen the crown
Encircle royal brows, and yet have deem'd
The wreath of talent worthier of renown.
But now the majesty of nature awes,
The weight of ages bends their mortal pride ;
Silent they stand, till, after wondering pause,
They slowly ramble onward, side by side,
And thus again to former conversation glide :—

XXXVIII.

RALEIGH.

"Thou thinkest, then, the queen hath overpass'd
Her just prerogative, in that she hath
These daring Puritans to prison cast,
Who in the Commons cross'd her royal path?
Good Will, 'tis strange: thou art no Puritan;
That ghost of thine hints at the Romish creed:
No democrat; thy heroes to a man
Despise the vulgar mob, and reign or bleed
The Lord's anointed: 'faith, thou puzzlest me indeed."

XXXIX.

SHAKESPERE.

"I am a puzzle to myself, Sir Walter,
A thing of paradoxes; yet, be sure,
The spirit of the Commons soon will alter
A power that now with murmurs they endure.
There was a rampart around despotism
Ere Luther rose; then, bred in self-distrust,
The people gave their souls to Romanism;
And private judgment, trodden in the dust,
Could nothing dare against a government unjust.

XL.

"But now the priestly tyranny is gone,
And men regain the might of self-esteem,
Democracy will lead his followers on,
And hardly leave the regal throne supreme.
The human mind hath been for ages bent;
Let crowns beware recoil: the rushing stroke
Will shake the pillars of all government;
And subjects, throwing off subjection's yoke,
Will deal, I fear, with kings as kings their wrath provoke."

XLI.

RALEIGH.

"The Muses help thee! these old shades have changed
The player to a prophet! When will come
The day our world shall be so much deranged,
That kings from rabble-lips must hear their doom?
How can the Commons gain the House of Lords?
How undermine this rampart of the throne?
Thou know'st, the peasant's toe but ill accords
With lordling's kibes; how then can they alone
Meet the full vengeance of the' insulted crown?"

XLII.

SHAKESPERE.

"Windsor is very near to Runnymede:
What hath been done may yet be done again.
Thou know'st, too, whence our subsidies proceed;
The Commons will not hold the purse in vain.
We may be dead, Sir Walter, ere that day;
Yet come it will; and if our kings are wise,
They will, contented with a moderate sway,
Resign all odious power; as merchandise,
Though valued, is cast overboard when storms arise."

XLIII.

RALEIGH.

"Bird of ill omen! why, thou croakest loud,
And scarest my wit: yet were it ill to jest,
If thy prophetic eye can see a cloud
Whose fury will pour down on England's best.

As yet I see it not, nor wish it near ;
Though there are times, good Will, when courtly smile
Cast on the' unworthy makes me sigh, that here
One cannot rise but by intriguing guile,
Wherein fair talent yields to supple favourite's wile."

XLIV.

Go read,
And thou shalt learn how rolling years have pass'd.
For me, I hear the voice of death proceed
From Stratford, where the poet breathes his last.
Afar from taverns, theatres, and thrones,
He hath in peace enjoy'd his latter days ;
But now to native earth he leaves his bones,
Gives to all ages his enchanting lays,
And, entering death's dark hall, the debt of nature pays.

XLV.

On Tower-Hill the sable scaffold stands ;
The axe and block a knightly prey await :
Sir Walter, doom'd to die at Spain's commands,
Must take from servile hands the blow of fate.
Erect he to the fatal block ascends,
As one long used keen peril to endure ;
To God his fluttering spirit he commends,
Then, smiling, cries, "This medicine sharp, yet sure,
Shall now in this poor body all life's evils cure." *

* See Note E, at the end of this Canto.

XLVI.

Now Nature's handmaid, gentle Spring, doth dress
Her lovely mistress in her best array ;
And, all-enchanted with her loveliness,
Prince Charles through Windsor Forest wends his way.
His palfrey proudly bears the noble boy,
And champs the bit, and snorts, and snuffs the air,
And, tossing up his head, and prancing high,
Seems in his master's happiness to share,
Afar from pining want, from peril, and from care.

XLVII.

Now, in swift gallop o'er a verdant glade,
Charles meets with high delight the western breeze ;
Now wanders slowly through a woody shade,
Absorb'd in sweet romantic vagaries.
Anon he stops a landscape to admire,
Where leafy shade and gilding sunlight meet ;
Then looks around to find the humble brier
That gives to every wind its perfume sweet ;
And now dismounts to pluck a floweret at his feet.

XLVIII.

His mind is tuned to harmony ; the song
Of nature's choristers around him flows ;
He hears, and tarries listening oft and long,
Till in his breast a new-born rapture glows.
"'T is Love," he cries, "that now their song inspires ;
'T is Love that warbles forth their melting lay :
O Love ! within my bosom light thy fires,
Nor leave my heart in coldness and decay
Beneath the chilly garb of royalty's array."

XLIX.

The sun now rises to his noon-day height,
The light cloud melteth in the azure sky ;
The earth is deluged with a flood of light,
Pour'd from high heaven to cheer and beautify :
The swallow wheeleth low his swift career,
The cawing rook with heated languor flies ;
The herd, the patient sheep, the timid deer,
Deep in the shade repose with half-shut eyes ;
And in excess of joy the song-birds' music dies.

L.

A thousand trees are waving to and fro,
Their dark green leaves drink in the solar rays ;
Ten thousand flowers their petals open throw,
And upward cast a long enamour'd gaze :
The grass and herbs, with which fair Nature weaves
Her emerald carpet, sparkle to the view,
And upward point their blades, and spread their leaves,
Now all disburden'd of the load of dew
Which cooling eventide with such profusion threw.

LI.

Upon Snow-Hill prince Charles delighted stands,
His mind all teeming with poetic dreams :
Around him are the works of nature's hands,
And in the distance the huge Castle gleams.
A thought of pride comes flashing o'er his soul,
That he is heir of all, a destined king :
" I will," he cries, " stamp more on history's roll
Than the mere impress of a sceptred thing,
From whom the virtuous fly, to whom the vicious cling."

LII.

No purpose fills his mind, no settled scheme
Of rule imperious or of sway benign;
But Fancy wakes her many-colour'd dream,
And sudden impulse paints the fond design.
Romantic youth disdains the boundary
Of principle, which checks the wayward will;
O'erleaps the fence, and rambles, wild and free,
Across a wilderness, where vale and hill,
Pathless and fruitless all, surround the wanderer still.

LIII.

"Childhood and youth," exclaims the Hebrew sage,
"Childhood and youth are vanity:" alas!
Why dwelleth Wisdom with decrepit Age,
While Youth and Health their days with Folly pass?
Yet what is aged wisdom? Can it bring
The smile of pleasure, or the thrill of joy?
Do thankfulness and hope the treasure fling?
Or is it but the dust, the dross, the' alloy,
Which sad experience rakes from life's vain alchemy?

* * * * *

LIV.

Through Windsor ring the echoes, loud and deep,
Of England's murmurs at despotic sway:
The British lion waketh from his sleep,
And fills with angry roar the ear of day.
Fair Liberty, arising from her trance,
Demands and gains her long-imprison'd "rights;"
Then, leading on her dauntless sons' advance,
Attacks the props of tyranny, and smites
Strafford the brave, and Laud the fool of Popish rites.

LV.

Star-Chambers, High Commissions, headlong fall ;
The power of Proclamations melts in air :
The bold and faithful Commons govern all,
And freedom's ramparts build with jealous care.
Angry and powerless, Charles is forced to reign,
As kings hereafter may,—with just the name ;
But evil counsels urge him to regain
His high prerogative ; to' assert his claim
To powers unconfined, as down to him they came.

LVI.

From forth the well-known "Garter" comes mine host,*
A man of sense, of courage, and of wit,
To greet his nephew, who hath ridden post
From Pennington, the patriotic cit.
"Ha, George!" exclaims mine host, "thou 'st ridden hard.
What news hath driven thee, thou heedless boy,
That thou for life of beast hast no regard?
Or would'st thou with some gem, some costly toy,
Win frowns from me, and smiles from cousin Mary's eye?"

LVII.

"Dear uncle, I have news should cause thy blood
To boil within thee, if thou yet art free :
Pym, Hampden, Hollis, Hazlerigg, and Strode,
The fathers of our new-born liberty,
Are charged with treason! and, three hours ago,
The King himself demanded their arrest—
As these seal'd messengers will doubtless show—
In tyrant-fashion ; but ere his behest
Shall be obey'd, we 'll drag the eagle from his nest."

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* See Note F, at the end of this Canto.

LVIII.

"Here, Mary," quoth mine host, "this lad of thine
Is martial mad. If thou would'st save the king
And yonder Castle, take now and confine
This threatening hero with thine apron-string.
Go, get ye gone, ye turtles, while I read
These fiery letters. Ha! who now shall trust
Thy word and faith, king Charles? This hasty deed
Tramples thy royal honour in the dust,
And points against thy throne the last, the fatal thrust."

LIX.

Mine host sits musing long: the stranger tells
His cousin Mary all the London news,
Mingled with kisses; but he chiefly dwells
On rights invaded, armings and reviews
Of patriot soldiery; and boasts that he
Is made an ensign; and perchance she yet
May see yon fort, that den of tyranny,
Snatch'd from its lords, by honest men, who whet
Their swords on freedom, and who strike before they threat.

LX.

It is the heart that hears; a lover's tongue
Is always musical; Love's simplest phrase
Is richer melody than e'er was sung
By bard of ancient or of modern days.
And so they talk delighting and delighted,
Though danger in the future frowning stands:
In accents soft their troth is often plighted,
And with fond pressure Love enclasps their hands,
As more endearing word or look some note demands.

LXI.

Yet in her teens, to Mary life appears
So full of hopes, of joys, yet budding forth,
That, as they ripen, long-revolving years
May taste the sweetness of this happy earth,
Till life be ended. As the morning flower,
Artless, and chaste, blooming in innocence
To every eye, dreads not that spoiler's power
May snatch the fairest of its blossoms thence,
And bruise its weeping stem with ruthless violence ;

LXII.

So Mary, guileless, dreads no lustful guile,
Nor need she dread it, in her cousin-lover ;
No villany doth his pure love defile,
Nor honour's mantle black dishonour cover.
Trimm'd by the hand of piety, desire
Burns steadily within his faithful heart.
Yet there lives one in whom the brutal fire
Burns with such fury, that, to ease the smart,
He vows her ruin, or by force, or fiendish art.

LXIII.

When wild Ralph Emmett, a gay cavalier,
Approach'd her with love's warmest whisper'd word,
With changeless "No" she turn'd away her ear,
And fled his presence like a startled bird.
A soldier and a courtier, he esteems
Himself dishonour'd by the truthful maid ;
And, as with murmurs all the country teems,
His plan of vengeance like a net is laid
To catch the flying fair alone and far from aid.

LXIV.

George is away; mine honest host, accused
Of treasonous correspondence, is secured
A prisoner in the Castle; all unused
To forms of law, dear Mary is allured
To ask for Emmett's influence for her sire.
She enters, and beholds him all alone:
Warn'd by a flash of thought, she would retire;
But all too late; his arms are round her thrown:
She shrieks, and prays, and struggling shrieks, till sense
is gone.

LXV.

Are all thy bolts of vengeance quench'd, O God,
In floods of erring mercy? Shall the cry
Of struggling virtue reach thy dread abode
Unnoticed? Woe is me! no help is nigh.
* * * * * * *

NOTES.

Note A.—Page 60.

For an account of these martyrs, see Fox's "Martyrology." When Henry VIII. was informed of their death, he exclaimed, "Poor innocents!" The brutal hypocrite! This imperious Tudor has been better thought of as a Reformer than he deserves: witness his last will. As a king, his memory only awakens execration; and as a man, sickening disgust.

Note B.—Page 62.

At the general confiscation of the abbeys and monasteries, the abbot of Reading, Hugh de Farringdon, refusing to deliver an account, to the visitors, of the revenues and treasures belonging to the foundation; himself and two of his monks, named Rugg and Onion, were attainted of high treason, and, being condemned, were hung, drawn, and quartered, at Reading, in the month of November, 1539. Parts of the ruins of this extensive abbey are yet standing.

Note C.—Page 68.

"What can ennoble knaves, or fools, or cowards?
Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards."—Pope.

Note D.—Page 70.

The fine old beech pollards, growing near Burnham, about six miles from Windsor, are as worthy of the tourist's visit as the poet's lay. I doubt if any one can ramble beneath their venerable shades without some such emotions as are here versified.

Note E.—Page 74.

At his execution, Sir Walter Raleigh, feeling the edge of the axe, said, "It is a sharp medicine, but a sure remedy for all evils."

Note F.—Page 78.

Although Shakespere has immortalized "the Garter Inn," tradition has forgotten its locality. Some say, the present "White Hart" was formerly "the Garter;" others, that "the Garter" stood where now a silk-mercer's shop attracts the fair in High-street; and others, that the present "Star and Garter" was, and is, the very house of "mine host." While the oldest inhabitants disagree on such an important point of topography, we young ones are content to stand neutral.

THE FOURTH CANTO.

ARGUMENT.

Joyce and Cromwell—The Puritans in Windsor Castle—Besieged by prince Rupert, but without success—Joyce and Mary—His account of seizing the king at Holmby—Council of officers at Windsor—Winter—King Charles keeps his last Christmas at Windsor—He is tried, condemned, and executed.

TIME.

FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE CIVIL WAR TO JANUARY 30TH, 1649.

I.

AFAR from Windsor, in a northern shire,
Whose frowning hills o'erlook its barren moors;
And all the land, with aspect wild and drear,
Laments the long, cold winter it endures;
Young Joyce rides onward to the famous band
By Cromwell led: he meets that dauntless man,
And offers his credentials from the hand
Of Vane the younger. With a hasty scan
Over its short contents, thus speaks the veteran:

II.

"This tells me that thou didst surprise and take
The fort of Windsor for the Parliament;
But that 't is best thou shouldst those parts forsake
Till clamour ceases at a late event.
I like not riddles; wilt thou frankly tell
A plain, blunt soldier, and a father, all
That drives a youthful hero forth, to dwell
Far from his triumphs and his father's hall?
Or should it hidden lie beneath oblivion's pall?"

III.

"Would God it might! It is a fearful tale
Of lust triumphant, by revenge pursued
Down to the gates of hell, the shades which veil
The crimes of an unnumber'd multitude.
I loved and was beloved: my promised bride,
An only child, was all her father's joy.
A courtier villain for the maiden sigh'd,
But sigh'd in vain; then, vowing to destroy,
He made her filial love a ruinous decoy.

IV.

"With treason charged, he kept her sire in hold
Within the Castle: there the maiden went,
In tearful beauty with affection bold,
Dreamless of danger or of ill intent.
Poor lamb! she suffered for her trustfulness;
The brute enforced her to his curst embrace:
In vain her cries; swooning in dire distress,
She fell a victim to the foul disgrace,
And, when poor life return'd, crawl'd feebly from the place.

V.

"I met her thus, and learnt the horrid truth:
Rage drove me mad; I hurried to and fro,
Brought down my company, and urged the youth
Round Windsor to arise and strike a blow
For love or hate. They rose; we burst the gate,
Disarm'd the palsied guard, pursued and took
The violator: he foresaw his fate,
And, by his courage and his pride forsook,
Begg'd hard for life, while all his frame with terror shook.

VI.

"I gave him till the morrow, then he died;
His blood be on his head! My heart was hot
With deadly vengeance; nor could I abide
Till slow-paced law had cleansed dishonour's blot.
Some sickly fools have raised a hue and cry,
And call'd it 'murder;' therefore come I here,
Until this sympathetic clamour die:
So friends advise. For me, I nothing fear,
Nor dread to meet the wrath of king or cavalier."

VII.

CROMWELL.

"This is no time for men of war to yield
The spoils of victory to the grasp of law.
With wrongs all pity-proof thy heart was steel'd;
His blood *be* on his head! thou didst but draw
The sword of justice on a guilty wretch.
But, for the lady,—wilt thou break thy vow,
And cast her coldly off? or, dost thou stretch
The hand of love to draw her to thee now,
Sincerely as thou didst ere shame had veil'd her brow?

VIII.

"Thou dost? 'T is well, my son; these are the times
Wherein the wrath of man shall praise the Lord.
We had been slaves, had not such horrid crimes
Lash'd us from slothful murmurs to the sword.
Thou art not single in thy grief and rage;
My bravest ones are men whose galling wrongs
So fiercely urge them, when the hosts engage,
That through and through the battle's thickest throngs
They dash like thunderbolts: the praise to God belongs!

IX.

"Yet must I say, they are a gallant band,
Men fearing God, and valiant for the cause,
Soldiers of principle, who take their stand
For conscience' sake, and not for man's applause.*
I pray the Lord increase a thousand-fold
The number of his servants: we are weak;
Yet if He lend us strength, as lions bold
We shall o'ercome the mighty; we shall wreak
The vengeance of the Lord on this proud Amalek.

X.

"Fear not, young man; thou shalt not want for posts
In which, if thou art faithful, thou shalt have
The aid and blessing of the Lord of hosts,
A life of honours, and an honour'd grave.
Be of good courage; 't is a noble work,
To stand within the gap, and save a realm.
These pestilent Malignants round us lurk,
With treaties subtly to regain the helm,
Or with some sudden tide of war to overwhelm.

* See Note A, at the end of this Canto.

XI.

"We trust to catch the crafty in his craft,
The valiant by our valour to subdue,
To ward or blunt the dark assassin's shaft,
And, trusting in the Lord, our way pursue,
Till regal crowns and towering mitres fall
Down to the level of their usefulness.
We would no more: the Lord, who knoweth all,
Discerneth this,—we do but seek redress
For wrongs like thine, and tyrannies which all the land oppress."

XII.

JOYCE.

"I do believe it; and by Heaven I swear,
That principalities and powers and thrones
To me are vanity,—things light as air,
While struggling Freedom for deliverance groans.
I would not boast; yet if there be a task
Which others shrink from, colonel, think of me;
Tell me thy purpose, and I will not ask
A thousand questions of propriety;
Dangers, that scare the slave, but stimulate the free."

* * * * * *

XIII.

In Windsor Castle, statues, saints, and crosses,
Altars, plate, vestments, paintings, decorations,
Relics of Popery, the soldier tosses
And breaks and rends, with sneers and imprecations
On all St. George's blinded devotees,
His wealthy canons, and his wealthier dean,
Who bow'd at names and altars, and on knees
Of cold formality were daily seen
Mumbling confessions and old prayers which nothing mean.

XIV.

The sneers are bitterness, the wit is keen;
The Puritans' harsh features wear a smile,
As broken images bestrew the green,
And tatter'd remnants fill the marble aisle,
Amidst this scene, "mine host" comes armed in,
Whispers a word, and quick the rolling drum
Sounds general alarm, and wakes the din
Of preparation; while an eager hum
Flies swiftly round, "Prince Rupert and his army come!"

XV.

"E'en let them come; the Lord of Hosts is here.
The God of Jacob is our refuge," cry,
With hearts enthusiastic, yet sincere,
This fearless band of patriot soldiery.
Each in his place, they sternly stand prepared
For life or death, for sortie or defence.
Ha! 't was their cannon that so fiercely glared
To hurl defiance on the impotence
Of Rupert's raging strength to fright or drive them thence.

XVI.

"On, to the traitors!" cry the Cavaliers,
"And chase these cur-dogs from the lion's lair.
Now for your skill, ye loyal cannoneers;
Arouse yon Roundheads from their howling prayer,
And give them cannon-music to their psalm.
What! dare they fire? the varlets! By St. George,
These knaves are trusting in their Gilead's balm;
Now, gunners, now, send them a powder-purge,
And drive your pills of iron down their pious gorge."

XVII.

Tearing, roaring, flashing flames and death,
The hollow engines vent the foeman's ire;
Earth shakes, the winds in horror hold their breath,
And sulphurous clouds the azure skies attire.
On either side the iron hail destroys
The workmanship of God, his creature man:
The Puritans expire with prayers and sighs;
The Cavaliers, with oath and curse and ban,
And some with horrid jests, complete life's shorten'd span.

XVIII.

At length the day fades out, and drowsy night
Comes with its languor and its quietude,
To still the clamour of this cannon-fight,
And cool awhile the soldier's fever'd blood.
Now grieve the pensive o'er their comrades slain,
The weary and the sober seek repose;
The profligates the sparkling goblet drain,
With healths to friends, and triple hate to foes,
Till drunkenness and quarrelling their orgies close.

XIX.

Awake, awake! ah! 't is the voice of war
That breaks so suddenly the sleeper's dream,
And calls to life the stupid wassailer,
Whose aching head but prompts him to blaspheme.
Again the cannons roar from either side,
Shot answers shot, and death to death replies:
Such distant war is gall to Rupert's pride,
And he resolves a daring enterprise,—
To storm the place, and by sheer courage win the prize.

XX.

A heavy fog comes rolling o'er the plain,
And hides the' attacking column's swift advance ;
The Castle-soldiers point their guns in vain,
So thick a darkness fills the wide expanse.
They hear the tramp of enemies, and feel
The spirit of resistance in them glow ;
Then, in the fulness of religious zeal,
With songs their confidence in God they show,
And, singing thus, they boldly wait the coming foe :—

1.

The Lord our God is Lord of all :
He reigns above,
Enthroned in uncreated light.
He smiles,—his angels veil their sight
With golden wings :
Ten thousand times ten thousand sing
To harps and lutes of sweetest string,
Till the whole round of heaven with rapture rings.
He speaks,—his word is sacred law,
Mute silence holdeth heaven in awe ;
He speaks,—his law is love.
The thousand thousands fall before him.
All, lost in boundless joy, adore him,
The Lord their God, the Lord of all.
Who reigns above.

2.

The Lord our God is Lord of all:
On earth he reigns.
Rebellious men his throne assail;
He looks in wrath, and what avail
Their rage and might?
He casts his winged lightnings forth,
He smites, and, lo! affrighted earth
Beholds these mortals sunk in endless night.
In Zion is Jehovah fear'd,
In Zion is his word revered,
Who holds his foes in chains.
To Him we look, in Him we trust,
The High, the Holy, and the Just:
Before Him men are but as dust.
The Lord our God, the Lord of all,
For ever reigns.

XXI.

The' assaulting troops, now closely drawn without,
Hear with derisive sneers the' exulting song: *
They fire a volley, and with lusty shout
To scale the southern walls tumultuous throng.
Cheers, oaths, and scripture mix with curse and prayer;
Pikes, swords, and pistol-shot commingled flash:
The Loyalists do all that men may dare
By cunning strategy or courage rash;
But, backward hurl'd, to earth they fall with deadly crash.

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* See Note B, at the end of this Canto.

XXII.

Again, again, succeeding troops ascend,
And for some moments battle hand to hand ;
But those within so manfully defend,
That none may long before their valour stand.
Cast headlong rolling o'er their friends below,
The Cavaliers or dead or wounded fall ;
Yet onward still the waves of battle flow,
And dash in vain against this batter'd wall,
Along whose sides grim Death holds horrid festival.

XXIII.

Beaten at every point, the' attacking forces
With fearful loss back to their camp retreat ;
Half-spoken sentences and mutter'd curses
Proclaim their inward chafing at defeat.
Within the Castle psalms and hymns are heard,
With prayer and lecture, fervent, loud, and long ;
The weary soldiers feed upon the word,
And drink the harmony of sacred song,
Until their spirits grow as mighty giants' strong.

XXIV.

Meantime the fallen round the ramparts lie,
And over them a sullen silence reigns ;
Save where a feeble groan, or feebler sigh,
Tells the endurance or the end of pains.
Here lies a lovely youth, in whom were placed
His parents' hopes in vain : close by his side,
A bloated debauchee, whose life disgraced
The cause he loved ; he falls with nought to hide
His name from infamy, save this,—he bravely died.

XXV.

Here lie all equal now, the young, the old,
The vulgar, the refined, the wit, the dull,
The loved, the cursed, the cautious and the bold,
The mild, the fierce, the mean, the bountiful,
And all the many characters which earth
Admires or sneers at: rank and grade
Lie prostrate all; the accident of birth,
Which men so gape at, is again unmade,
And all its brightness lost in death's impartial shade.

XXVI.

In birth, in sufferings, and in death, mankind
Are all alike; these are a triple chain,
By changeless nature wrought, for aye to bind
The world in brotherhood, to teach how vain
Are earth's distinctions, and to show how poor
The richest are, since wealth and honours fail
To purchase even an hour, or to insure
An easy passage down life's troublous vale,
Wherein unnumber'd ills all travellers assail.

XXVII.

Look on these slain, ye living; these are they
That, but an hour ago, were such as ye!
Nay, turn not with such sicken'd looks away;
Another hour, and ye like them may be.
Look at them: all that was of earth is there,—
The form of clay, the wonderful machine,
Which spirit vivified; and, lo! 't was fair,
And all at work its thousand wheels unseen;
But now 't is vile and useless, for 't is all terrene.

XXVIII.

More days of fighting slowly pass along,
Till, weaken'd sore, the Cavaliers retire,
To carry war where ramparts high and strong
Shield not their hated foemen from their ire.
Their drums roll merrily, their trumpets sound,
Their colours gaily fly, their horses prance.
And forth they march as though with victory crown'd;
Yet much they smart with chagrin at mischance
Which has so thinn'd their ranks, and check'd their arrogance.

XXIX.

Another scene now opens to my view,
Shaded with pensive thought, and dim with grief;
Where hopes once crush'd a sadder life renew,
And love in melancholy finds relief.
Again to Windsor cornet Joyce is come:
He clasps his weeping Mary to his breast;
"Ah, sweetheart! this," he cries, "shall be thy home:
Here on my bosom, loved one, shalt thou rest.
Dear Mary mine! thus blessing me and being blest."

XXX.

"'T is kind of thee, dear George, 't is very kind:
But thou deservest better love than mine.
Thou shouldst not on thy noble bosom bind
A blighted flower: I once did hope to twine
Around thy heart for ever; but 't is time
The dream of love should end, since I awake
To misery. O let me seek a clime
Far distant, where I may unheeded take
My fill of bitter thought, till this poor heart shall break!

XXXI.

"Take back thy vows, be free, dear George, be free:
Go, choose thee such a one as once was I;
And I will pray, yes, pray most fervently
For you, for thee and her, until I die."
"Take back my vows, dear Mary? Not while heaven
Shall be my hope; away with evils gone!
Let Love bind up thy heart so sadly riven,
Seal up thy memory, and lead thee on
Till thoughts of earlier years a wedding mantle don."

XXXII.

"Nay, tempt me not, dear George, pray, tempt me not:
'T is for thy sake I speak; I love thee so,
That, rather than be thine, to cast a blot
Upon thy name, I would lie down in woe,
And sigh my life away: nay, let me weep."
"Thou shalt not weep, my love; or I will kiss
Each tear away: this is a time when sleep
Should seize all sorrows, and true lovers' bliss
Be seal'd with fond embrace, dear Mary mine, like this.

XXXIII.

"Thy lips have honey on them, and thine eyes
Are bright as ever; tell me not of blots;
I am a soldier, and all calumnies
This sword of mine shall force down slanderers' throats.
Away, my love, with grief and fond romance
Of sentimental sorrows! Why, our days,
Cheer'd by thy smile, lit by thy witching glance,
Or charm'd to rapture by thy settled gaze,
Shall all be full of love, joy, gratitude, and praise."

XXXIV.

Ah Mary! how thy cold resolves are tried!
All warm'd and melted down, they mould to love:
"'T is better far to be so loved a bride,
Than mourn in anguish like a wounded dove."
As thus she thinks, her cloudy sorrows fly,
And hopeful sunshine gently cheers her mind:
Unheeded now, time passes swiftly by,
While she, upon her lover's breast reclined,
Hears of the daring deeds in which he late hath join'd.

XXXV.

He tells of Naseby field, where Cromwell led
His iron veterans to victory;
How Fairfax fought, Ireton and Skippon bled,
And Rupert and king Charles were forced to flee.
He tells of sieges, conflicts hand to hand,
And all the varied perils which wild war
Has flung so fiercely o'er the frighted land;
And how, all bleeding now at every pore,
Torn England longs to hail the final conqueror.

XXXVI.

"One day," he thus continues, "I received
A summons from high quarters. There I went
And this I heard: 'The country is relieved
From open foes; but now the Parliament,
In jealousy of us, are making peace
For selfish purposes with yonder king.
Fit shepherds these, to clothe them with the fleece,
And eat the fruits which all our victories bring,
While we, poor sheep, are left to want and suffering!

XXXVII.

"'We must amend this evil: wilt thou ride
To Holmby with five hundred horse, and take
The crowned Stuart from these men of pride,
And bring him hither, for thy country's sake?'
I answer'd him, 'The deed is somewhat bold,
And threatens danger; yet for England's weal
I would do more than hirelings dare for gold;
And thou shalt see, that with a Jehu's zeal
I will maintain our own good cause with heart and steel.'

XXXVIII.

"The monarch's guards no opposition made:
Around the dwelling I arranged my band;
Then with respect, but no absurd parade,
I told my errand: 't was in vain to stand
On ceremony, while around him stood
Five hundred troopers; men who would not fear,
In concert or alone, to shed his blood.
'I see,' he said, 'thou hast a warrant here,
Written in striking characters, well form'd and clear.'

XXXIX.

"His former keepers bluster'd loud and long,
With threats of vengeance from the ruling powers.
I only said, the noisy weapon, tongue,
Was scarce a match for such a force as ours.
I told the king, the army did demand
The nation's settlement; and if he lent
His aid thereto, then might he with high hand
Restore the troubled state, so torn and rent,
To peace and order, *malgré* mob or Parliament.

XL.

"He made a virtue of necessity,
And journey'd with us to the rendezvous;
Resolved by craft and wordy strategy
His foes to foil, his despotism renew.
If he make speedy terms, all may be well;
He may be king without 'prerogative:'
But if he quibble long, he strikes his knell;
He deals with men who know not to forgive,
And treacherous kings, dethroned, have little time to live."

XLI.

MARY.

"Alas, poor king! how terrible his fall
From regal power to utter helplessness!
His friends, his loved ones, slain or banish'd all;
And he a prisoner, pining in distress!
O, George, I pity him: 't is sad to think
How low he is; 't is horror to suppose
So fond a sire and husband on the brink
Of murderous exit: Heaven forbid his foes,
Though friends of ours, should thus the dreadful contest close!"

XLII.

JOYCE.

"I love thee for thy tenderness, dear girl;
But soldiers' hearts are, like their weapons, keen
And unrelenting: yet kind peace may furl
War's hostile banners, and with sway serene
Rule unopposed o'er all this martial isle.
Then jarring factions shall in concord blend;
And thou and I, dear Mary mine, the while
In wedded love our happy days shall spend,
Nor murmuringly desire, nor meanly fear, their end."

XLIII.

A change comes o'er the scene: 't is Windsor still;
And, in the Castle met, the army-chiefs
Hold secret council on the right to kill
The captive king, to end their nation's griefs.
First Ireton speaks, and, like a Roman old,
Hurls fierce invectives at the tottering crown:
Then Harrison, the' enthusiast and the bold,
Demands, in Heaven's name, that headlong down
Tyrants and principalities and powers be thrown.

XLIV.

Next Cromwell rises, and, with preface full
Of pious phrases, tells his deep regret,
That such a step alone can safely lull
All fears and jealousies; for never yet
Had treaties bound the king: that well he knows
The monarch's mind, who seeks but to regain
His regal power, to take revenge on those
Who struck him down: that blood of thousands slain
Is on his head, and justice should remove the stain.

XLV.

A murmur of applause too plainly tells
The settled purpose of these daring men:
Unsparing hatred in each bosom dwells,
And bloody treason issues from its den
Unmask'd and shameless; vengeance takes the name
Of righteous law; stern self-defence aspires
To gain the wreath of patriotic fame;
And bold ambition, as pure zeal, desires
To light himself to power by discord's mingled fires.

XLVI.

Monarchs dethroned have been in prison cast,
Till ruffian's dagger or the poison'd bowl
Robb'd them of life: these men have minds too vast
Thus to dismiss a royal culprit's soul.
They join to try him in a court supreme,
Where justice with unbandaged eyes shall see
Her royal prisoner, and to law's extreme
Pronounce the doom of this her enemy,
Who erst usurp'd her seat, to judge and slay the free.

XLVII.

All Windsor is astir: it is the day
Of Mary's marriage; and the glad event
Falls like a sunbeam on the angry spray
Of troublous polities; and forth are sent
A thousand sparkling hues of light and joy;
Though the deep ocean, dark and strong, beneath,
Rolls on its waves, all barriers to destroy.
Now, for a while, their swords all parties sheathe,
And with fond hopes and wishes twine a nuptial wreath.

XLVIII.

Cromwell accompanies the happy pair,
And bandies with mine host the mirthful jest:
A thousand eyes are fix'd upon the fair,
A thousand honest voices wish her blest.
The streets are lined with folk; the elders smile
And nod and whisper; laughing children throw
Their caps into the air, and shout the while
Like elfins free: before her, maidens go,
And strew the path with flowers, the fairest flowers that grow.

XLIX.

The merry bells ring out most merrily,
To tell that now the marriage-rite is over;
To promise, in their simple melody,
A like reward to every faithful lover;
And wake in wedded bosoms, from her trance
Of joys possess'd, fair Memory to tell
How they once throbb'd with all the high romance
Of love's young thoughts, until the wedding-bell
Welcomed reality, and bade wild dreams farewell.

L.

Now mirth and feasting rule the joyous hour;
The foaming tankards meet the thirsty lip
Of humble industry; while rank and power
And beauty bright the sparkling goblet sip.
Mine host keeps open house: a lengthy board
Is furnish'd for the poor with bounteous store
Of solid food; and, from huge vessels pour'd,
Their much-loved ale provokes the hearty roar
Of honest laughter at the jokes heard oft before.

LI.

The higher guests within "the Garter" sit;
Their dainty viands, and their costly wines,
All heighten'd by the pleasantry and wit
Which, flashing from mine host, so brightly shines.
At length the melancholy light of eve
Wanes into darkness, and the stars obtrude
Their smiling rays, to hint that guests should leave
The wedded lovers to the solitude
Of fond affection, free from eyes and voices rude.

LII.

'T is winter now, and all is sad and cold:
The chilly snow lies like a winding sheet
O'er silent nature; fogs and clouds are roll'd
So darkly o'er the day, that well nigh meet
The long and dreary nights: so fiercely shrill
The howling blasts are heard, that mortals shrink
In nameless terror; and with shivering thrill
The fireless poor, recoiling from the brink
Of pale starvation, on the cheerless morrow think.

LIII.

But that kind charity, denied access
To noble mansions, finds a resting-place
In humbler dwellings, hundreds in distress
Would yearly die, and tell their piteous case
To weeping angels. Hunger may be borne
When summer skies are bright; but who can bear
The frosty chill without, when inly torn
With gnawing want? 'T is this that points the prayer
Of anguish up to heaven, or freezes with despair.

LIV.

'T is Christmas day; king Charles is now confined
A prisoner in the Castle. Ah! how changed
In outward circumstance, in mien, and mind,
Since he a youth o'er park and forest ranged!
His head is grey, his eyes are dim; a cloud
Of pensive sadness o'er his features spreads;
Across his noble forehead care has plough'd
Her furrows deep, and still his bosom dreads
That some pursuing evil in his footsteps treads.

LV.

Oppressive, generous, powerful, yet weak,
Defied, supported, conquer'd, and betray'd;
Such his sad history: but Patience meek,
And humble Piety, all-soothing maid,
Are his attendants now; the iron scourge
Of stern Adversity but drives his soul
The nearer to his God; his hopes emerge
From life's wild waves, and seek their glorious goal
Far, far away, where years of peace for ever roll.

LVI.

With heart sincere before the Lord he kneels,
And, rendering homage to the King of kings,
A silent rapture o'er his bosom steals:
His waken'd spirit plumes her growing wings,
And, like a chained eagle, fain would fly
Beyond the feeble ken of mortal sight;
Would range in freedom o'er the pathless sky,
Lost in the' effulgence of unclouded light,
Amidst a world of spirits, happy, pure, and bright.

LVII.

'T is immortality begun, when thus
The soul is warm'd to life; time's bounds are pass'd;
The veil is drawn aside which hides from us
The world to come, invisible and vast.
What mighty thoughts within our bosoms rise!
What grand ideas sweep across our mind!
All far beyond what earth alone supplies,
Too wonderful, too glorious, too refined,—
The language of another world, with this combined.

LVIII.

He rises from his knees with mind serene,
And arm'd with preparation. Death may spread
The grave's wide portals open, yet the scene,
Though strew'd with fragments of the myriads dead,
Shall strike no terror; firm in confidence
Of life eternal, he can enter there,
And smile at the united impotence
Of Death and Hell, who, stingless, vanquish'd, dare
No deeds of violence upon salvation's heir.

LIX.

From Windsor taken, England sees him brought,
Alone and undefended, to the bar
Of self-appointed Justice; foes who fought
With keenest tongues or swords his judges are.
But now the pompous state of solemn law
Invests them with such powerful dignity,
That all the nation, struck with silent awe,
Look wondering on; and monarchs o'er the sea
Dread the contagion of this daring liberty.

LX.

Calm, firm, unshrinking as the noble rock
That breasts the fury of the' Atlantic's waves,
The royal prisoner sustains the shock,
And all their pomp and power and vengeance braves.
As man, he asks a court impartial, pure;
As king, their right to judge him he denies;
But, as a Christian, shows he can endure
The arrogance of legal sophistries,
The soldiers' scornful insults, and the rabble's noise.

LXI.

'T is done, the legal murder is decreed ;
Weak fears and angry jealousies exult ;
Democracy beholds his plans succeed.
And bold Ambition hails the fell result.
The scaffold and the axe are soon prepared ;
The hour arrives, and all is doubt and dread :
Now forth he comes ; his crownless head is bared ;
His last few, calm, forgiving words are said ;
The masked headsman strikes, and royal Charles is dead.

* * * * * *

LXII.

The spell is broken, and the vision fades :
The former ages, and the men of yore,
Like spectres, vanish to their gloomy shades ;
Nor may I see, nor may I sing, them more.
Yet, well I ween, they are but gone before ;
All we are posting on as once did they,
And soon our earthly journey will be o'er :
Yea, all that follow us must pass away,
And time itself expire in one eternal day.

NOTES.

Note A.—Page 87.

Whitelocke says, "Cromwell had a brave regiment of horse, of his countrymen, most of them freeholders and freeholders' sons, and who upon matter of conscience engaged in this quarrel, and under Cromwell. And thus, being well armed within by the satisfaction of their own consciences, and without by good iron arms, they would, as one man, stand firmly, and charge desperately."—Harris's "Life of Cromwell," page 81, ed. 1762.

Note B.—Page 92.

Most readers are aware of the great difference between the conduct of the Cavaliers and the Parliamentarians on the eve of a battle,—the former being generally engaged with "potations pottle-deep," and the latter in religious exercises.

The Castle *was* surprised and taken for the Parliament in the beginning of the war; prince Rupert afterwards besieged it, but without success.

THE END.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY JAMES NICHOLS,
HOXTON-SQUARE.

ERRATA.

Page 30. Last line but one, for *luxurious* read *luxuriant.*

Page 56. Stanza LIII., line 4, for *gory* read *gaping.*

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